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MURDER AT THE CLUB

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THE TRAITOR.
THE FOURTH DAGGER.
THE DARK SPOT.
THE END OF THE TRAIL.
THE JUNGLE CRIME.
THE MASKED STRANGER.
MURDER AT MIDNIGHT.
BLUE PETE: HALF-BREED.
BLUE PETE RETURNS.
BLUE PETE: DETECTIVE.
THE SIRE.
THE PACE.
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THE LONE TRAIL.
THE BLUE WOLF.

MURDER AT THE CLUB

BY

LUKE ALLAN, pseud.

William L. Amy

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THE CHARACTERS

Members of the Wanderers' Club:

JIMMY DOLAN, a criminal lawyer.
WENDELL FORREST.
J. HARRY LANSING.
DOCTOR THORENSEN.
DOCTOR BLANEY.
SHIPMAN, Club Secretary.

JACOBY, Club commissionaire, or clerk.

BILL DRAYCOTT, a bell-boy at the Club.

His mother.

JENNY DRAYCOTT, alias Luscombe, niece of the above.

TIGER LILLIE, crime reporter of *The Star*.

JERRY INKERLEY, City Editor of *The Star*.

INSPECTOR ARMITAGE, Inspector of Detectives.

GORDON MULDREW, a detective.

MRS. CROSBY, Muldrew's landlady.

MURDER AT THE CLUB

CHAPTER I

IN A BLIND STREET

WITH a heavy sigh Gordon Muldrew crumpled to a ball the paper he was reading and threw it violently into the waste-paper basket. For a moment or two he sat, staring moodily at the wall, then, raising himself slowly by the arms of his chair, an involuntary muscular exercise, he hung there balanced for a full minute.

As he opened the door of his office the face of Sergeant Coddling appeared around a barricade of Number 11's.

"Why the blazes don't you cough, or whistle, or something when you're on the way?" the Sergeant grumbled, bringing into view from beneath his desk a half-consumed cigar and waving away a cloud of smoke that hovered over his head.

Muldrew emerged from his abstraction. "If you didn't smoke those odorous throw-outs, Sergeant, even the Inspector might forgive a breach of the rules now and then. I should have put on a gas-mask."

Coddling grunted and yawned. "All right for *you*: you can go out and look for trouble. I always said a working detective ——"

"I'm not looking for trouble to-night, Sergeant." Muldrew settled his hat more comfortably on his head. "I've had enough to satisfy me till Christmas."

"Yeah, you didn't do such a putrid job in that Fourth Dagger case," Coddling admitted grudgingly, "and you musta got a lot of fun out of it, you and

that reporter brat, Tiger Lillie. That impertinent young cub worms his way into everything about this place that's got a thrill to it."

"Tiger has been useful, Sergeant," Muldrew reminded him.

"Sure. Useful to *The Star*. Still, I got to admit he seems to be able to squeeze through a crack now and again that's too narrow for us. Here, take one of these stinkers and get your mind off your other miseries."

Muldrew shook his head.

"Oh, well, if you *will* get morbid about your successes. That fellow Sperring deserves to be hanged and quartered—and all we're allowed to do is the hanging part. A policeman's job, it's always running up against disappointments like that."

"Yes . . . I know. Sperring's a devil." Muldrew leaned his big bulk against the desk and stared at the floor. "I don't know when I ever ran across more brutal and more wholesale murder. . . . But Sperring had his points."

"They were all damned sharp!" Coddling grunted.

"But see how much worse he might have been, Sergeant."

Coddling lifted a pair of hands like hams and let them fall again. "You make me weep, you softie. Bluebeard and—and Landry might have been worse. If they'd had a chance," he added, with disgust

"He had a chance to do for Tiger and me," Muldrew persisted, "such an easy chance. Well, it's over now." He eased away from the desk. "Me for a long night's sleep—if I can get that noose out of my mind. Good-night, Sergeant."

"Night. And tip the boys to run 'em in with better cigars on 'em. I'm getting nosy. I'm always open to bribery ——"

Muldrew drew the outer door softly behind him. The moment the night air touched his cheeks he felt better. A world of briskness enveloped him, and he stood for a minute or two on the steps drinking it in. Save for a hurrying pedestrian across the street he was alone, though the traffic of Markham Street was within a stone's throw. The clamour of it seemed to isolate the police station, to set it apart from the fever and stress of every-day life.

The detective lifted his face to the band of speckled sky above the roofs across the street. Nothing he liked better than to creep from a busy street and stare at the sky. It took him back to his childhood days on the farm, a dozen miles from the nearest town, where life, that had seemed so colourless then, returned as the one persistent vision of a paradise to which he might retire—and forget. Those nooses—the ugly gallows; the loops he had strung around so many necks, the gallows he had filled! It did not comfort him that the punishment of the law was deserved—that stalking criminals was his job.

"A job that never ends," he sighed. "From one crime to the next—and not enough hunters for the criminals!"

A radio poured soft jazz from an open window. A lad came whistling around the corner.

Muldrew straightened his shoulders and dropped swiftly to the street level. With but a fleeting glance toward Markham Street and the way home, he turned in the opposite direction.

At a fruit store he paused long enough to purchase three bananas, and these he munched as he went along, tossing the skins carefully against the curb. He walked without conscious direction, except that the turmoil of Markham Street grew fainter and fainter at his back. . . . Gradually the depression of the

evening lifted. The Fourth Dagger case was solved —he had done his duty and was free once again— free ! The pressure of pursuit was eased for the time being, the dull ache of approaching success and its attendant tragedy. A trace of ecstasy lengthened his stride and lifted his broad shoulders.

Cross streets dropped behind him—a dozen—a score. Though he had eaten nothing for nine hours except those three bananas, he was unconscious of hunger. When his mind was occupied he could go for two days without food. . . . Street lights thinned out, making the night spotty and uneasy. A railway level crossing uptilted the street slightly before him.

As he bent to the grade a familiar tingle shot through him, and, without altering his pace he looked curiously about.

He knew where he was. At the left a street ran off to utter blackness, a blind street, he knew, choked off not more than two hundred yards in its course by a curve in the railway. A street that led to no house— without a goal.

Yet fifty yards along the street the parking lights of a car stared dimly at him ; and beside them was the red rear light of another car.

Muldrew's eyes clung there, though he tried to wrench them away. This was no business of his—a surreptitious meeting, to be sure ; but in a hundred by-ways of the city lovers met like that. But, a driving sense warned him, so did conspirators, criminals, plotters against the law he was paid to uphold. An inbred suspicion, the instinctive inquisitiveness of his profession, riveted his attention. But the training of his profession kept him moving, though his pace slowed a little.

Dimly against a cluster of railway lights far down the track he saw a man's head emerge from one car,

and a hand from each car met. Not a sound reached Muldrew but the soft chugging of the two engines.

Muldrew frowned, shook himself free, and hurried on, stubbornly fixing his eyes on a corner light ahead. His eyes, yes, but not his mind; so that he almost collided with a small boy racing over the lift of the crossing.

And at the next corner the detective wheeled sharply to the left and, reaching a street-car line, returned to the city.

Sergeant Coddling welcomed him with a lungful of odorous smoke.

"If you've thought better of it, Muldrew, and come back for the throw-out you refused, you're out of luck. This is the last—and it don't taste like the kind mother used to make." He sat up as Muldrew continued absent-mindedly towards his office. "Say, have you brought something to liven a dull night—a little murder or two, for instance?"

Muldrew stopped and faced him. "Nothing doing, Sergeant. A dull night—and I'm a fool."

"I've been telling the Inspector that for ——"

"I wish you'd look up a car licence for me—E28743. I'll hang around till you find out." He passed into his office.

In a few minutes Sergeant Coddling broke in on his reverie:

"If you've helped yourself to *that* car, Muldrew, you're in for it. It's Jimmy Dolan's. Jimmy'd have the laugh of his lifetime sending you where you've sent so many of his clients."

"Jimmy—Dolan's!" Muldrew scowled at a knot in the floor. "What in the name of common sense was Jimmy doing out there—at such an hour? . . . I'm standing on my head if that car was stolen . . . I wish—I wish I'd got the other number." He stretched

and rose. "Hang it, Sergeant, I'm in for a sleepless night for sure."

Sergeant Coddling eyed him gravely. "You don't mean you've—got something on Jimmy? God! wouldn't that tickle the Inspector all up the back? Say, if you could get Jimmy out of the way for a couple of years we'd lose our jobs. This city'd be so clean there'd be parlour-maids patrolling the streets with whisks instead of flat-footed policemen. . . . But it ain't possible. Jimmy's too slick for that. I'd hate to have a suspicious nature like yours, Muldrew."

CHAPTER II

AN INTERCEPTED MESSAGE

ANOTHER scene—same night—almost the same hour. A scene of more action—greater obscurity. A scene that, had Gordon Muldrew been on hand merely as a spectator, would have saved him several worrying hours during the days that followed.

From behind *The Evening Gazette* Wendell Forrest glanced surreptitiously at his wife. He glanced several times—glanced more than he read. A few minutes ago he had answered the telephone, and to his wife's petulant query had returned an evasive reply.

Forrest was a handsome man of forty, but the best that could be said of his wife was that she was no fitting mate in looks. Still, two hundred thousand and further prospects covers many a flaw in a wife. It would, Wendell had decided, condone a sketchy quantity of grey matter as well; but he had erred in thinking Nan was deficient enough in brains to fail to realize in time the price she had paid for him. Thus life had become uncomfortable for them both.

The clicking of her needles—the one performance at which she was competent, and everlastingly persistent, was knitting—irritated him. He had learned to read her thoughts through those flying needles, and he knew now that she was just waiting to break loose. With the defiance of a small man he threw down the paper and lunged to his feet.

"Where are you going now?" she asked, with the sweetness that prophesied a storm.

"To the office," he snapped.

"Do you need to work all day and all night too?"

He swallowed his anger. "My dear, how do you think I pay for this house" (which he didn't) "or that nice dinner you served, or the dress you're knitting? It's our misfortune, my dear, that my job isn't bounded by the clock. I've so often told you," sighing, "that it's easier to convince a client alone, in the quiet of your office, with a good cigar between his teeth —and apparently nothing to interest us but our friendship."

"Why don't you try it here at home?" She was too angry to wait for his reply. "Your office!" A needle jabbed into an innocent loop, and her husband winced. Each of those jabs reached a sensitive spot an indulgent observer might have called his conscience.

"Certainly my office. I said my office." He stumped to the door.

"Yes—certainly—your office!" she scoffed. "I called up that office of yours last night—when you were supposed to be there."

"Uh—yes. You know these telephones. You see ——"

"Of course I see. You weren't there."

Furious and defiant, and stubborn as he was, Wendell Forrest had not yet steeled himself to escape by insulting flight. He shifted his feet about, not having learned that his feet were, to his wife, infinitely more revealing than his tongue.

"Last night? Uh—yes—last night. Let's see. Last night I had to go out—for a short time. I had to go ——"

"Don't add a lie to your other vices, Wendell," Nan broke in savagely.

Her husband sighed. He was accustomed to getting the worst of it in their exchanges. "All right, you won't listen. But I'm telling you I got to go to the office to-night. Perhaps to-morrow night ——"

"One thing I've learned since our marriage—to-morrow night never comes."

There was a point where Wendell Forrest became firm. It arrived where he had nothing appropriate to say.

"I'll be back in an hour—or so," he said, and stalked from the room.

As the elevator whirled him aloft to his office on the seventh floor of the Cosgrave building he was still wiping his forehead at intervals. Nan Forrest had one accomplishment on which her husband had not counted — she could force him to brood; in time she might even break him of some of his lesser habits.

Letting himself into the outer office, he stood for a moment in the dark. He felt miserable and depressed, and a little uneasy about the way things were going. Life, the same life that gleamed so brightly at times, feeding his vanity, so often turned drab. He sighed and switched on a single light before passing through to his private room.

There too he stood for a moment in the dark. He was not himself to-night; he felt alone, unguarded, exposed. The comforting noises of the street reached him and he went to the window and stared down on the animated scene, dragging some slight comfort therefrom.

Braced a little, he turned with a muffled curse and, switching on the centre light, dropped forlornly into the chair before his desk. There he sat for a time,

chin on chest, eyes unfocused. Now and then he lifted his head to listen. Once he reached for the telephone, but his hand dropped limply away before it touched it.

After a long time he took from a drawer a sheet of paper and commenced to write. He wrote jerkily, rushing for a few words, halting for seconds in the middle of a sentence, chewing the end of the pen—frowning, sighing, muttering.

All about the wall at his back stood tall filing cabinets; a desk filled one corner. And from the knee-space of that desk a human face peered out malignantly as Forrest wrote.

The writing ended with an angry flourish, and Forrest drew from his pocket a worn purse and extracted two bills. These he folded into the sheet he had written and enclosed the whole in an envelope. With the letter in his hand, evidently ill at ease, he clambered to his feet and went to the window.

The man concealed beneath the second desk crept out, covered by the desk Forrest had left. In his right hand he carried a wicked-looking automatic. Forrest had lifted the window and leaned out. The stranger glided through the door to the outer office. Letting himself quietly into the corridor, he hurried around the corner to a branching hall and knocked three times at an office door. The door opened, though no light showed through the glass. A hurried conference ensued, and two men emerged and descended the stairs to the floor below.

Silence reigned on that floor. Not an office seemed to be occupied. An elevator clicked somewhere. The two men crept to the letter-shaft and one drew a diamond cutter expertly in a rough circle over the glass. A sheet of fly-paper was attached, and a

sharp rap broke the glass free. It was drawn out. Not a splinter had escaped.

On the floor above a door opened. One of the men inserted both hands in the opening. A flutter of white shot down. It was caught and withdrawn. The two men returned to the office they had left on the floor above.

CHAPTER III

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE PROFESSION

SOME fifteen hours later the Writers' Club held its weekly lunch at the "Yellow Teapot." The ugly room where the members sat on ugly plush chairs, rescued from a junk shop, was well filled. The odour of cooking onions tickled appetites none too often satisfied, and noses sniffed frankly.

Tiger Lillie, crime reporter of *The Star*, speaker of the day, placed his feet on a chair and indulgently accepted from the Club President a cigar reserved for visitors. The honour weighed heavily on Tiger, though the Writers' Club was composed of the younger, more hopeful fraternity of scribblers, or would-be scribblers, who picture a best seller as a personal attainment, and the author's name on the talkie billboard as more to be desired than riches. The Vice-President officially was ready with a lighter—filled from composing-room gasoline.

Tiger was talking:

"Yes, boys, it's a fact, this that I'm telling you." He leaned back and blew a ring across the room, and watched it lazily as it made a ringer on the gaunt nose of the Secretary. It broke into the Secretary's eyes, and Tiger came to himself. "Uh—take my word for it, there's not a darn thing in all this bunk about crime detection. Don't swallow the yarns that line the news-stands. Of course, that's the sort the public wants, but the truth would make mighty plain reading.

Look at my friend, Gordon Muldrew. You've all heard of the uncanny stuff he pulls off. Well, I'm telling you ——"

From the other side of the room someone snorted, and a languid voice followed it up:

"You've been telling us for years what a wizard your friend Gordon Muldrew is. The Gang got fed up on his praises."

"The Gang!" Tiger sniffed. "The Gang!" he repeated, feeling for a way out. He waved a scornful hand. "Gentlemen, I ask you. Our friend over there, Louis Bracken, is one of the Gang. Need I say more?"

A laugh started uncertainly, divided between polite applause and the danger of offence to an honoured member. Louis Bracken waved his pipe.

"Go to it, boys. Tiger's our guest."

Tiger scowled. Louis' aplomb was always difficult to disturb.

"For years," Tiger threw at him, "I've struggled to raise the tone of Louis' slim-waisted Kolum in *The Gazette*. If he chooses to swallow all I say ——"

"My digestion was never too good," Louis murmured. "I have to take care of it. Never mind, Tiger, spin us another."

Tiger grinned. "That's about even, Louis. But I'm telling you boys the truth. It's just too bad for Louis, because he won't believe it and it's sure to addle his already addled wits. Listen. The mob thinks Gordy's success is due to some sort of magic — divination, necromancy, telepathy, or something like that—something denied the rest of us—a superman. Don't you believe it. I've worked with Gordy, and I've worked against him ——"

"Do you think it's proper to work against the police —for a reporter, I mean?" inquired one of the youths timidly.

Tiger inhaled a whiff of smoke and coughed. "I don't mean I actually work against them—interfere with them, I mean. I'm out to run down the criminal, of course; but when Muldrew thinks to hide the inside dope from *The Star*, that's where I come in, with both feet and a running tackle. It's my job to see he doesn't put it across. My job's to get the news, and," with affected modesty, "if you ask the police I think they'll admit that I've had the good fortune to put them on the right track more than once, at the same time. Even Louis knows that."

"Give me a chance, Tiger," Louis pleaded. "Leave me with a decent reputation."

The boyish, friendly grin, that came so readily to Tiger's face, spread over it. He waved it aside.

"Let's get along. Louis has trouble enough without me picking on him. What you want from me is some of the back-bar dope on city crime and detection. I think I can talk a bit on that—after lunch, of course. Just now, with that odour of liver and onions in my nostrils, I'll only prepare the way, furnish the text, so to speak, by remarking that the detective is just an ordinary man—one of us, you might say. He has this to his advantage, that it's his job to follow clues, and he has all the help and license there is lying about. In fact, the foundation of much of his success is stool-pigeon work—clues handed him on a silver platter, so to speak. Now and then they lead somewhere—and those are the cases we hear of."

"The cases that get into the papers," suggested a member.

Tiger ignored it. "The detective's job isn't half as labyrynthine and intricate as any conscientious reporter's in the digging of news. Of course, the professional after a time gets wise to certain signs, but to credit him with any special sagacity, anything

psychic, is poppy-cock. I venture to say," he went on, glowing to their wide-eyed attention and approval, "I could reach out and touch a score right here in this room who, with a bit of experience, and the authority and sources of information open to the police, could make the average detective look like a doodle-bug. Yes, boys, I tell you ——"

The door opened and a platinum blond, once removed, thrust a white-capped head into the room.

"Mr. Lillie here?"

"Oh, quite," Louis murmured with a chill smile.

Tiger leaped to his feet. He glared at Louis. "If I was just the doctor being called from a public gathering for the advertisement, I'd stay and punch your head."

He disappeared, ignoring the smiling waitress who held the door open for him.

"Probably the Mayor—or the Chief of Police—or the Big Boss on *The Star*, just gasping for Tiger's assistance," Louis muttered, reaching out to help himself from the visitors' box of cigars, a move promptly intercepted by the President.

"Just the same," averred the timid member, "Tiger's going to have something to say worth while. I've often wondered about these detectives. Tiger ought to know something about them. He's had the experience ——"

Tiger burst into the room. His red hair bristled with excitement.

"You bet it's a real call," he cried. "Jerry Inkerley, my City Editor! A murder at the Wanderers' Club! Bite on that, Louis."

He wheeled and ran.

"Might as well take your hat," Louis drawled, shying it after his friend.

CHAPTER IV

CRIME IN HIGH PLACES

The Wanderers' Club, known colloquially and discourteously as "The Plutocrats' Circus," a term originating with Tiger Lillie in *The Star*, was the most exclusive club in the city. From initiation fee to coffee at eleven it stood as a barrier to poverty and thrift. To hang one's hat in its cloakroom was a password to the good graces of almost any woman in town—though not infrequently it failed as collateral at the bank.

It was a beautiful stone and brick building in the best part of Percy Street, whose architect had bought a life membership with a modicum of his commission and "pickings," and by the very size of the latter had climbed higher in the estimation of his fellow-members than by the style of the building he had produced. Anyone who could get away with that was well up in the list of modern business men. The structure was set well back of a wide lawn of velvet grass and barricaded from the paths of the less fortunate by shrubs and flowers that were manicured and barbered and massaged with the regularity and care of the season's debutante.

The front door, as befitted the club idea, was modest and unwelcoming. In the small hall beyond a sign directed visitors to a room on the right, where a second sign, "Ring," above a push-bell completed the

formal procedure by which alone a visitor could justify his presence. And while the subdued stranger waited for a reply he might look out on the street through small leaded windows, or through a smaller one in the door into the hall by which he had entered. The sanctity of the Club proper, it said, must not be violated by the uninitiated.

Gordon Muldrew leaped from the police car before it came to a stop, and ran up the succession of terrace steps to that unwelcoming door. As he ran he took in the façade of the building and instinctively laid it out in his mind. The half dozen high Gothic windows on the left, softened and mystified by heavy crimson silk curtains, would be the lounge. On his right the four narrow windows were the visitors' room. Beyond that two more pretentious windows, an office of some kind. Exclusive—yes, but nothing was too exclusive to demand at some time the practice of his profession.

He had often passed the building, and he recalled now that never before on such a bright day as this had the front door admitting to the tight little hall been closed. Now its heavy oak carving seemed to defy advance. He pushed it open and entered. Ahead, at the end of the hall, was the entrance to the main lobby, the door that opened only for members and closed behind them almost quickly enough to catch their heels. A policeman at the entrance to the visitors' room stood aside for the detective.

Two men turned to face him as he entered the small room, one a huge policeman who, with a wry twist of his face, pointed with his thumb to a chair whose back was to Muldrew. The other, equally large, straightened his shoulders.

"Doctor?" Muldrew inquired.

"Doctor Thorensen," said the second man, with a

formal bow. "I happened to be in the building." He stepped away from the chair.

Muldrew did not hurry. His mind was running over what he knew of Doctor Thorensen, a man who had amassed a fortune in his profession—by means, at times, that had come under the unannounced scrutiny of the police.

In the chair to which Constable Jameson had pointed a girl lay curiously twisted, as if, with a dying effort, she had curled against the back of the chair to keep from sliding to the floor. Her head sank to one side and her shoulders drooped, but the rest of her body, especially that part visible from the door into the hall, was natural enough. One arm hung limply over the chair arm, while the other rested easily in her lap.

As Muldrew bent over her a slight sound at his back brought him sharply about.

"Don't go, Doctor, please." The tone was soft but authoritative. "I'll need you."

Doctor Thorensen had already opened the door. Out in the lobby groups of men were scattered about, and they turned to stare into the room.

"There's really nothing I can do," Thorensen declared impatiently.

"Except stay," Muldrew said. "Please close the door. Thank you." He looked about the room, making a complete circle of his body. "You were called, of course, when the body was discovered?"

"That's right. I was upstairs in the billiard-room when Jacoby came for me."

"Who's Jacoby?"

"The Club clerk. We call him the Commissionaire. The Club is run on English lines."

"Yes, of course. He'd be the one to find the body, of course. . . . How long ago were you called, Doctor?"

Thorensen considered. "Not more than ten minutes ago."

"You were called immediately the body was discovered? But that's impossible. The police message came longer ago than that."

"You'd better ask Jacoby about that," Thorensen returned indifferently.

Muldrew turned to the policeman. "Jacoby is still in the building, Jameson—and everyone else who was here when you arrived?"

"O' course. Phillips is out there in the lobby, and we've got the back door under guard. Things is O.K., o' course." Jameson's tone was slightly querulous. Those conventional precautions—what did Muldrew think?

Muldrew paid no attention to the body; his eyes were on Thorensen.

"There isn't a thing I can add," Thorensen said, striving to maintain an indifferent manner. "I cut the cord, of course, but I didn't touch the knife. I saw right away she was dead. Even if she'd been alive I'd have hesitated to touch that knife till she was on the operating table. . . . Besides, I knew the police would wish to find things as they were."

Muldrew nodded approvingly. "You thought of the police, then? So few do."

"I've been a police witness before now," said Thorensen.

"As you will be again, Doctor." Muldrew turned to the body. "You spoke of a cord. Ah, I see—around the neck it was." He stooped to examine a thin scarlet line that extended about the fair throat of the dead girl. "But you wouldn't say she's been strangled to death, would you?"

"Certainly not." Thorensen made a sound of disgust. "Strangling wasn't necessary with that knife where it

is—straight into her heart. Arterial blood, that." He pointed to the dark stain down the front of the dress.

"You knew she was dead," Muldrew remarked in a musing tone, "yet you cut the cord. It would have been better, Doctor ——"

"It was an instinct; anyone would have done the same," Thorensen broke in indignantly.

"Yes . . . and you left the knife." Before the Doctor could speak he continued: "I was thinking only of the police part—finding things as they were. Of course it was natural—to do something. How long would you say she'd been dead when you saw her first?"

Thorensen raised his broad shoulders and let them fall again. "It couldn't have been more than a few minutes. I mean, a few minutes since she was stabbed. You can tell that from the blood right now."

"Yes—certainly. . . . Besides, I can learn more about this from Jacoby. I'll ask him."

A tall, soldierly, grey-haired man with pointed moustaches bustled in from the hall.

"Quick work, Muldrew. I thought I'd beat you down."

"The car happened to be at the station door, Inspector," said Muldrew. . . . "After all, speed doesn't seem to have been important. . . . Has anyone but yourself been in here, Doctor?"

"No one—since I came, I mean. Except Jacoby, of course—and the police. Jacoby left just as the police arrived, I think."

Muldrew drew Inspector Armitage aside. "Inspector," he whispered, "would you mind going out through that door—it leads into the Club lobby—and leaving it open behind you? There are a lot of interesting—and interested—faces out there that I'd like to size up when they don't know I'm looking."

"Every man in this Club is interesting till we get this thing cleared up," said the Inspector grimly. The Wanderers' Club was made up of men who, in the ordinary way, were not to be trifled with.

He went through to the lobby and walked about, leaving the door open behind him. Muldrew seemed unconscious of the staring faces outside. Easing the girl's body slightly to one side, he drew from the seat of the chair beside her, where it had fallen and been concealed by her dress, a small leather handbag. The Inspector returned at that moment. The door remained open. The two detectives turned their backs to it and opened the handbag.

It was almost empty. Muldrew drew from it a purchase slip of a department store, a compact, a smaller purse that contained no money whatever, a small silver pencil, a handkerchief, and a slip of paper that, on being spread out, proved to be a receipt for rent from the Chalfont Apartments. All of these Muldrew thrust in his pockets.

"The Chalfont!" The Inspector pursed his lips. "Wouldn't you know it from her clothes? She looks Chalfontish. It won't be hard to trace her now."

"I didn't anticipate much difficulty about that," Muldrew said. "She's not the sort of girl—it's not the sort of girl who'll come to the Wanderers' Club to see a member—who could lose her identity for long. . . . There's so much to find out in the next few hours that I scarcely know where to start."

They returned to the dead body, and while they examined it not a face visible through the door to the lobby escaped Muldrew's attention.

The girl, they decided, was about twenty-four. She was beautiful, but with a beauty soiled and hardened by a make-up carefully but too liberally applied. Her

clothes were expensive and becoming, and her hands were soft and white, with well-manicured nails. Muldrew spoke to Doctor Thorensen :

" You may go now, Doctor, but please stay in the building. It will save both of us inconvenience," he ended sharply, as the Doctor started to protest.

Thorensen wheeled and, restraining himself with difficulty, had reached the door when Muldrew spoke again :

" By the way, Doctor, you mentioned a cord. I don't see it here."

The Doctor came back into the room and looked about. " I cut it. . . . What did I do with it ? I must have—I don't know." He looked vaguely about the floor.

" Perhaps it's in your pocket," Muldrew suggested. He was watching Thorensen intently.

The latter raised a wandering hand to an outer pocket, then to another, and suddenly smiled sheepishly.

" Ah—yes, here it is." He produced a piece of small but strong cord and handed it to Muldrew.

When Thorensen was gone, and the door closed, the two detectives regarded each other for a moment in silence. Inspector Armitage nodded several times.

" That's Thorensen. He'd accuse himself even of murder. . . . And I don't say he hasn't been guilty of it more than once—indirectly, of course . . . if not directly. By the way, give me the story, Muldrew."

Muldrew told all he knew.

" We'd better get Jacoby in right away. ' Commissionaire '—English—the law-de-daw stuff ! " Inspector Armitage turned up his nose. " Wouldn't you know it ? We'll have the ' Commissionaire ' in."

" If you don't mind, sir," Muldrew interposed, " I'd like to look about first."

He bent over the dead face. The lips were vividly carmined, and the cheeks, under their coating of powder, had been heavily rouged. From his pocket he drew the compact he had found in the girl's purse, and opened it.

"Funny," he muttered. "That isn't the make-up I'd associate with the face that's under it."

"If you had a daughter of your own, Muldrew," the Inspector grunted, "you'd know all the landmarks fail nowadays. You can't judge a girl's character—I hope—by the nature, or the thickness, of her make-up, in these days of hip-flasks and movie ambitions and easy divorce. How a man knows where she's going to land him when he hooks a girl I don't see—or what she looks like after a bath. God knows he knows what she looks like before it—all over mostly ; but the girls know better than to go into the water—except at midnight, in some private pool, where everyone's too lit up with cocktails to notice. I'm thankful I married before girls got too deep for us. You've taken an awful chance waiting so long." He cleared his throat noisily. "But that doesn't get us anywhere. What the deuce was she doing here ? Isn't it a devil of a place for a murder ? We've had 'em everywhere else."

Muldrew continued to study the dead girl's face. "It's a mask, that make-up. What does it mean ? Somewhere there's a kink that made her make herself look like that . . . and in that kink, I'm thinking, we'll find the solution of the crime."

"Maybe she thought the men liked it," the Inspector suggested.

"*Cherchez l'homme,*" Muldrew murmured.

"What's that ? "

"Oh, nothing ; just a venture."

"Well, don't waste your Gallic on me. . . . Say,

that knife certainly got home." He leaned over it. "You haven't touched it? I hope no one has. Jasper should be here any minute."

A sudden thought sent Muldrew hurrying to the lobby door. "Excuse me a moment, Inspector."

As he opened the door a gale of subdued talk met him. The groups were still there through the lobby, and Muldrew let his eyes rove swiftly over them. They rested for a fleeting moment on two figures standing in the open hall door. One of them turned to face him and, without another word to his companion, crossed the lobby to a counter at the rear end. His companion disappeared.

Muldrew gave no sign that he noticed anything worth his attention. He approached a door on his left, that opened, he found, into the reading-room. Three men were there, two reading the morning papers. The third, lounging luxuriously on a huge leather couch, blew a cloud of smoke in his direction and smiled.

"Of course you'd be about, Muldrew," he said.

"Hello, Jimmy! This ought to interest you as much as it does me."

Jimmy Dolan's smile stiffened. "You've got me there, Muldrew. Spring it."

"It's as much in your line as in mine, isn't it?"

"Not until I'm retained by the defence," Dolan replied, his smile growing less teasing. "Up to then I wish the police every success. Indeed," blowing a long line of smoke thoughtfully before him, "it's the successes—the apparent successes—of the police that give me my work. If you didn't find someone to blame, where would Jimmy Dolan's job be?"

"Perhaps in a more law-abiding occupation."

"'Law-abiding?'" Dolan's voice hardened.

Muldrew's attention had passed on to the other two

occupants of the large room. Once, he had noticed, each pair of eyes appeared from behind their respective papers, and more swiftly vanished.

He returned to the lobby. The man he had seen at the door stood now behind the counter. Muldrew beckoned.

"Your name's Jacoby, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir." In the two simple words was a crisp brevity that did not escape Muldrew.

"Look in that room, please, and tell me who are the two there besides Mr. Dolan."

Jacoby hesitated, his face a mask, then, returning to the counter, he picked up a handful of newspapers still in their wrappers and carried them into the reading-room, opening them as he went. Muldrew watched him admiringly.

"The one near the window is Mr. Forrest, Mr. Wendell Forrest," Jacoby reported. "The other is J. H. Lansing." With a stiff bow he started away. Muldrew touched his arm. It was but a touch, but it brought Jacoby to a halt.

"Were those three men in there when the body was found?"

Jacoby straightened and looked down his nose. "I don't know where everyone was, of course." His eyes lifted slowly to Muldrew's face, and his manner altered. A curious emotion blazed for a moment. "Yes—yes, they were there—there in that room!"

"Thank you. Be good enough not to mention a word of this to anyone. I'll know if you do." He thrust his head forward until his face was within a few inches of Jacoby's. "Now, stay about the building," he ordered. "I'll want to talk to you in a few minutes."

As he walked toward the visitors' room he considered Jacoby. The man's manner puzzled him — so

restrained, so guarded, yet underneath some intense excitement played. The turmoil of the puzzle stopped him in the middle of the lobby, and he returned to the counter.

"Are these men we see all that were in the building at the time of the murder, Jacoby?"

"So far as I know. They all came out here, all but the three in there. Everyone in the Club knew about it. You see, I had to get a doctor, and it got around."

"All but the three in there, you say?" Muldrew turned toward the doorway into the reading-room. From the corner of his eye he saw that Jacoby, too, was staring toward the reading-room, that strange intensity once more exposed. Muldrew wondered if it was fury, or just the excitement of the murder.

"Have those three been out here in the lobby since the discovery of the body, Jacoby?"

"I'm sure I saw Mr. Forrest here . . . yes, and Mr. Dolan. I'm not sure about Mr. Lansing."

His excitement was less restrained.

At a slight sound at his back Muldrew turned. Then he strode across to a closed telephone booth and looked through the glass door. Inside, a small bell-boy leaned his head in his arms against the wall; now and then a sob escaped him. Muldrew asked a question with his eyes.

Jacoby shrugged. "One of the bell-boys. It's nothing, sir. He's a bit tender-hearted, Bill is. He peeped into the room there, and it knocked him out. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

"Did he say nothing—make no comment?"

"Not that I heard—but I wasn't noticing. It's easy to understand when you know Bill." Again he shrugged, and turned away to his place behind the counter.

Muldrew went to the policeman standing stiffly beside the door leading to the cloak-room.

"There's a lad in that telephone booth, Phillips," he said. "Don't let him out of your sight . . . or Jacoby there, either."

CHAPTER V

IDENTIFICATION

JASPER, the finger-print expert, was in the visitors' room when Muldrew reached it. He had nothing to report—except a profane indignation that there was nothing to report.

"That knife handle," he snorted, "it's as clean as if it grew there. Not much use looking anywhere else. Goodness knows how many have been in this room at one time or another recently enough to leave their finger-prints. The rogues who do these things these days know too damn much for me and my job. Huh! First thing I know I'll be one of the unemployed."

"At the worst, Jasper," Inspector Armitage said soothingly, "you're a guard against carelessness, a guarantee of a certain polish and *finesse* in crime. Murder isn't half as—as convenient a pastime as it used to be. And if every murderer left a finger-print there'd be no use for detectives; an ordinary policeman would be enough. Only don't quote me, Jasper."

Muldrew had taken his stand before the body. "Thorensen says," he mused, "the body was never touched, except to cut the cord. But look at that."

Inspector Armitage came and stood beside him, and for a time the pair looked down on the dead girl.

"Thorensen or no Thorensen," declared the Inspector, "she's been moved all right. She never died that way. Someone—the murderer, of course—took time to arrange the body so that anyone looking in would not suspect."

"Send Doctor Thorensen in again, Jameson," Muldrew ordered.

In a short time the Doctor entered, too indignant to try to conceal it. "I don't see why ——" he began.

Muldrew cut him short. "I'm not interested, Doctor. Tell me, do you know nothing more of the woman than that you were called by Jacoby to attend her after he found the body?"

"Why—why, certainly. What did you think?"

"That's immaterial."

"But—but I told you that."

"Not in so many words. . . . Have you never seen her before?"

The question, though practically a repetition of the first, did not increase Thorensen's exasperation, for he turned away and looked through one of the windows.

"No—of course not. At least, I don't recognize her. Of course, in our profession—we meet so many people—you know how it is—and we may never see them again."

He did not hear the Inspector grumble to himself: "Particularly in *your* profession."

Muldrew appeared satisfied. "Of course—of course. Passing patients, for instance—hospital cases, and all that."

The Doctor eyed the Detective for a moment. "And now may I go? I must have an early lunch. I'm due at the office in an hour."

"Certainly, certainly, Doctor." Muldrew waved him away. "I hope I haven't interfered with an appointment. And thank you for your assistance. Jameson, tell Phillips to let Doctor Thorensen leave the building any time he wishes. . . . No one else, however."

Thorensen opened the door. As he did so a man hurried into the lobby from the hall and, after a look of surprise at the crowded room, came within sight

of the group within the visitors' room. At that moment Inspector Armitage moved, exposing the body of the girl to the gaping eyes in the lobby. The new arrival hurried forward.

"Anything I can do, gentlemen?" he asked. "Anything in my line? I'm Doctor Blaney. If I can be ——"

He leaned abruptly forward and stared into the beautiful white face of the dead girl.

"By—Heavens!"

Muldrew was at his side in a couple of strides. "Close that door, Jameson. You know her, Doctor?"

Doctor Blaney looked wildly from face to face. "Why—why—yes—in a way. Professionally, I mean—if you'd call that knowing her."

"What's her name?"

"Miss—Miss—let me think." Blaney squeezed his fists into his eyes. "You see, I've seen her only twice—no, three times, and the last time must be two or three months ago. Miss . . . Miss . . . ah, yes, Luscombe—Luscombe, that's it. But—" he stepped back and surveyed the body with a puzzled frown—"she doesn't look the same—dressed so differently—and the make-up. . . . Still, I can't be mistaken."

"It's not unusual," said the Inspector dryly, "for a woman like that to have more than one dress. . . . And make-up is a daily operation—with the fashion almost a daily change."

Doctor Blaney regarded him absent-mindedly. "But it's more than that; it's altered her—changed her—her character, one might say. But I'm quite sure I'm right—it's Miss Luscombe."

"Was she a patient of yours, Doctor?" Muldrew asked.

"Yes, that was it—a patient, but for only a short time."

"You'll have a record of her visits, of course, and all about her case—professionally, I mean."

"Cert—" He struck a fist into the other hand. "No, I'm afraid I haven't. You see, it was a charity case. She came to me with a tale of poverty. That's why she looks so different now—in those clothes and—and everything. I treated her without charge."

"What did you treat her for?"

"I never enter my charity patients ——"

"What did you treat her for?" Muldrew repeated.

Blaney's eyes narrowed. "Have you a right to demand that—a professional secret?"

"We'll have it now — or later," the Inspector promised ominously.

"It's really nothing." Blaney shrugged. "Secrecy is a tenet of our profession, as you know. There's no reason, other than that, why I shouldn't tell. It was —neuritis, neuritis in the left shoulder. She was an attractive girl, as you see—worth helping, I thought, one of the many down-and-outers professional men are called to serve. I gave her a diet and a few exercises. It wasn't exactly in my line, of course, but she had such faith in me. I'm afraid," with a smile, "I get more credit than I deserve. Since she didn't return after the second or third visit I decided she was better. I'd quite forgotten her, in fact. And now—that!"

He pointed to the knife and the long crimson stain that extended from it, and shuddered. Suddenly he turned away and staggered to the window. The two detectives watched him with frank surprise.

"Rotten exhibition — for a surgeon," Blaney whispered huskily, leaning his hands on the window-sill. "It came over me suddenly. It's—it's murder, not the blood—or the knife. Murder—and here in the Club! . . . And in a way I knew her! That's what brought it home so hard. I'm all right now."

He straightened his shoulders and returned to the body, coldly professional now.

"She never had a chance," he said, "with that knife where it is—right through the heart. But," reaching toward it, "it does seem cruel to leave it there."

Muldrew struck his hand away. "Please don't touch a thing."

"Of course, of course. I should have known. I'm sorry." He leaned forward and pointed to the thin red mark the cord had left about the dead girl's neck. "What's that?"

"That," said Muldrew savagely, "was torture before murder, a brute choking her outcries till he drove that knife home."

Blaney drew a quick breath. "It's terrible! . . . And here—right here in our Club!"

"We're coming to that, Doctor." Inspector Armitage's teeth closed with an audible click.

"You may go now, Doctor," Muldrew said, "but please don't leave the Club till we give permission. Jameson, ask Jacoby to come in."

CHAPTER VI

THE LEADING WITNESS

THE hall door burst open and Tiger Lillie rushed in. Inspector Armitage and Muldrew glared at him. Tiger responded with his ready grin.

"Morning, gentlemen. Fine day for a murder, eh?"

"Don't be frivolous, young man." The Inspector scowled. "By God, you reporters are human vultures: you smell blood a league away."

Tiger had moved across the room. He saw the body, and his lips formed to a silent whistle.

"Oh, gee!" His eyes were riveted on the knife. "If you don't mind I'll sit over here in the corner and try to hold down my breakfast. I'm glad I didn't get to that liver and onions."

"How did you get to know of this?" Muldrew demanded.

"A little birdie —" Tiger began; but the look on the faces of the two detectives changed his tune. "I'll tell you if you'll let me hang around. All right, Jerry Inkerley sent me."

"How did Jerry know?"

"Search me. No, search Jerry. He called me up at the Writers' Club. I was to talk to them on—on ——"

"Where's Inkerley to be found now?" the Inspector snapped.

Tiger looked at his watch. "Jerry'll be in the midst of the early edition of *The Gazette*, our puny rival, estimating what's worth stealing. In fifteen minutes

he'll be souping at Tony's, with Waldorf salad and raisin pie to follow. But, for the love of Mike, don't tell him I told you or I'll need police protection. Jerry likes a quiet moment when —— Oh, these impetuous police!" he sighed, as the Inspector hurried from the room.

He took another hasty look at the girl. "Give me the low-down, Gordy, please. If you don't I'll have to guess, and you know how that'll embarrass you. I swear I won't peep a word I shouldn't."

Muldrew gave the essential facts as he knew them. He was still talking when Jacoby entered, and on his heels the Inspector. The two detectives retired to a corner.

"I got Inkerley," the Inspector whispered. "He says someone called him—someone here at the Club, he thinks. He doesn't know who it was. These newspapers—they have us stooping when it comes to tips."

"We must find out who it was, sir," Muldrew said.

He turned to Jacoby, who had stopped just inside the door and stood, stiff and white-faced, his unfocused eyes directed toward a window. His jaws were set. Before the detective could speak Jacoby said:

"I heard what you were talking about. It was I called up *The Star*."

"Why did you do that?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Jacoby countered. "I know of no reason. I wanted this dirty business to get all the publicity it could."

"Why did you wish publicity?"

"Because it seemed to promise the quickest way to find the murderer."

"Don't you think that's the business of the police?"

"Certainly. That's why the police would be the last to question it."

Muldrew watched him through his thick eyebrows. "You seem profoundly interested, unusually concerned. Why?"

"Wouldn't you be if—if"—his manner altered abruptly, one of those changes that puzzled Muldrew—"if you were here, sir—what I am in the Club? I talked to her—I took her message . . . and I found her—murdered. In a way it—it reflects on me. What I did I did for the best, sir."

Muldrew nodded. "I don't question your honesty but only your judgment. This is police work, and we prefer to set about it in our own way. . . . The newspapers are useful at times—but it's wise to let us decide the times." He looked to see how Tiger was taking it, but the reporter had left the room. "In all these cases, Jacoby, there are incidents and clues that are better kept secret for a time. The newspapers only make it harder for us."

"I'm sorry, sir, if I did anything wrong—or unwise," Jacoby apologized; but the apology was insincere.

"So often sorrow comes too late," growled the Inspector. "All right, Muldrew, fire ahead."

"How did this woman come to be here at all?" Muldrew asked. "You knew she was here, didn't you?"

"Certainly. She rang the bell, of course. I answered it."

"What did she want?"

"She asked for—someone."

"Who did she ask for?"

"Must I answer that, sir?"

"Certainly."

"It was Doctor Blaney."

Inspector Armitage whistled softly. "Doctor Blaney! The man who was here just now?"

"Yes, sir."

"But he wasn't in the building."

"No, sir. I found that out. I looked all over for him."

"Tell me, Jacoby," said Muldrew, "is it usual for such a crowd of members to be here at this hour — I mean, at the hour the body was found?"

"Sometimes there are more. A lot drop in for coffee between eleven and twelve. It's a wonder, too, Doctor Blaney wasn't here; he's one of our most regular visitors at that time."

"Hm—m!" Muldrew frowned down on the white face against the back of the chair. "Then she must have known of the Doctor's habit."

"I know nothing about that, sir." Jacoby's lips tightened. Once more he was the Club servant, revealing no secrets. "She asked for him, that's all I know."

"Not quite all," the Inspector purred. "Go on — from the time she asked for Doctor Blaney."

"Well, it took time to go through the building — looking for Doctor Blaney. We have a lot of rooms, and the members sit all over the place. Doctor Blaney often brings a book, or picks up a magazine, and gets away by himself to read. I couldn't believe he wasn't here—he's so regular. . . . I may have been away ten minutes, perhaps a few minutes more. When I came back—that!"

"You found her as we see her now—exactly?" Muldrew asked.

Jacoby turned slowly to face him. "I—think so. Certainly I didn't touch her. I know better than to disturb a body before the police arrive. I never saw anyone touch her—no more than Doctor Thorensen cutting the cord around her neck."

"Then you must have seen right away that she was dead. I should think only a doctor could decide that."

A chill smile flitted across Jacoby's face. "Wouldn't you know it—that knife where it is? But—but when I saw her first—when I came into the room to tell her the Doctor wasn't here, I guess I was too startled to think of anything but getting help—a doctor. I thought there'd be one or two in the building. I found Doctor Thorensen in the billiard-room; I brought him down. . . . It was he who told me to call the police."

"Perhaps he suggested calling up *The Star*, too," the Inspector ventured.

"No, sir. By that time — with a doctor here— I suppose I was over my fright. I thought it was a case for the widest publicity and right away, so I called up *The Star*. That's all I know, sir, quite all."

The two detectives conferred in whispers.

"You heard no cry—nothing from this room while you were searching for Doctor Blaney?" Muldrew asked.

"No, sir. I would be too far away to hear, even if she screamed." He shivered, and his face seemed to grow whiter. "She wouldn't have a chance to scream, with that cord around her neck."

"You saw Doctor Thorensen cut it?"

"Yes, sir. It was the first thing he did—about the only thing."

"Has this girl ever been here before?"

For the space of a split second Jacoby did not reply. "Few women care to come here," he said. "Even the wives of the members. It might be misunderstood."

"'The Plutocrats' Circus!' I'd hate to have a reputation like that." Inspector Armitage made a sound of disgust.

Jacoby flared up. "It's the dirty mind of the public," he said.

"She was never here before?" Muldrew repeated quietly.

"Not to my knowledge, sir. Often a bell-boy answers the visitors' bell—when I'm not in the lobby. I don't know that I'd recognize all the women who've been here. You see, coming in from the lobby and facing those windows, I don't see much of their faces."

Muldrew walked about the room. A door in the wall opposite the front hall attracted his attention and he turned the knob, only to find it locked. As he turned back his eye alighted on the hall door.

"Does that calendar always hang there?" he asked, pointing to a large advertising calendar that covered the glass in the door.

Jacoby stared at it. "Why — no. It always hangs there — on that little glass hook beside the door."

"Was it in its place when you answered the girl's ring?"

"I couldn't say—I didn't notice. . . . But," he declared confidently, "I think I'd have noticed if it was out of place."

"You didn't notice in the many times you've been in the room since," Inspector Armitage barked.

"Conditions are different," Jacoby retorted angrily. "One thing I'm sure of—the calendar has been moved recently."

"You can guess why—and by whom," sniffed the Inspector.

He lifted one of the dead girl's hands. Several rings gleamed on the fingers.

"Woolworth's. These fake rings ——"

He caught at the other hand, wrenching the clenched fingers open. A twenty-dollar bill fell from it.

"Ever see this before?" he asked.

Jacoby had stepped forward and stood gazing from the dead face to the bill in the Inspector's hand.

"I certainly did not."

Behind Jacoby's back the two detectives exchanged glances.

"Did she tell you why she wished to see Doctor Blaney?"

Jacoby did not answer; his eyes remained fixed on the money. The Inspector put the question in another way:

"Was there any suggestion from her to explain the presence of this money?"

"Certainly not. . . . I didn't touch her—the body, I mean. That was Doctor Thorensen's responsibility." Suddenly he stepped to the table and picked up a magazine. "I'm quite sure the money wasn't in her hand when I left to look for Doctor Blaney. She was looking at this magazine—holding it with both hands, like this, when I answered the bell. The money couldn't have been there."

Inspector Armitage turned his back; the rest was Muldrew's.

"All right, Jacoby, you may go. Your statement has been most clear. Please don't leave the building; I'll want to talk to you again—about that bell-boy."

Jacoby did not seem to hear. He continued to stand, white-faced and tight-lipped, his eyes unfocused.

"I said you might go," Muldrew repeated. And Jacoby started, wheeled with military stiffness, and left the room.

"Say, Muldrew, it's a puzzler." Inspector Armitage glowered on the bill in his hand. "Whoever killed the poor girl knew nothing of this."

"Yet he went through her purse pretty carefully before he fled," Muldrew said. "She had more money than that. A girl doesn't run around with a

twenty-dollar bill in her hand and not a cent in her purse."

"Nor is it customary to murder a girl in the visitors' room of a club like the Wanderers'," the Inspector grunted. "Especially for robbery. Look at it any way, it's a mix-up. Where the devil did the money come from?"

"I'd rather know what it was intended for," Muldrew replied. He bent over the knife and carefully withdrew it. Carrying it to the window, he examined it; and a quick light showed for a moment in his face.

"Very clever," he murmured, "very clever."

The Inspector said impatiently:

"I see nothing that's clever about it, except that calendar—and the unusual place for a crime. The calendar hid the crime from the hall, and this room was certain to puzzle the police and lead us to false conclusions. . . . Let's see that cord."

Muldrew handed it over.

"It's easy enough," said the Inspector, "to see its purpose. But what I'd like to know is did the murderer creep on her from behind and choke her before she saw him, or did they meet first, and somehow he got behind her and strangled her before she could scream?"

Muldrew was bent over the back of the girl's neck. He held out his hand for the cord.

"Something funny here: the mark doesn't extend all the way around." He applied the cord to the mark. "Ah, you see? It's an inch too long. That wouldn't choke her—it wouldn't make that mark." He whistled. "Look here!"

He had inserted a finger inside the cord at the back. As the Inspector moved round where he could see Muldrew twisted his finger. The cord tightened.

"A sort of tourniquet! Someone with strong

fingers and a quick brain. With his left hand here he choked the breath from her, while with his right he drove the knife into her heart. . . . That's all we'll find here, sir. I'm going out there."

He nodded toward the low murmur of voices from the lobby.

CHAPTER VII

AN ALIAS

By the time Muldrew reappeared in the lobby the groups had scattered and reformed with different units. They made way for him to pass, eyeing him solemnly. Muldrew approached the counter. Jacoby was not there, and the Detective had turned to speak to Phillips when his eye lit on a pair of shadowy figures seated beside the pay telephone booths. He made for them.

Tiger Lillie heard him coming and lifted his head guiltily.

"Just keeping an eye on him for you, Gordy," he grinned. "Don't embarrass me with thanks. He's yours." He rose and strolled away.

Muldrew caught him by the shoulder. "What are you doing, Tiger—what were you doing with this lad?"

"I told you—just keeping him inviolate for you. You didn't seem to be getting anywhere in there, so I started to scout about on my own. I'm a jump ahead of you. Peeved about it? Bill here is a friend of mine—already—a mine of gilt-edged information. But he's a sensitive lad; handle him gently. So long. I'm off to a delayed lunch that's going to cost me more than the one this pleasant affair interrupted. But I don't begrudge the money. Watch for the high spots in the three o'clock edition."

But Muldrew noticed that Tiger did not leave the building. Instead he strolled into the reading-room.

A stifled sob at his side drew the detective back to

the bell-boy. He touched the lad comfortingly on the shoulder.

"All right, Bill. There's nothing to be frightened about. Feeling better, aren't you?"

"I'm all right, sir," the boy replied sullenly.

"Of course you're all right. A bell-boy has a reputation to sustain, you know. I never knew they took things seriously. The other bell-boy ——"

"It—it isn't the same with him," Bill burst out.

"No, I suppose that's so; he's a little older than you. I know it wasn't a pleasant sight—all that blood, and the knife."

From the corner of his eye he saw the lad turn his head away, and he wondered if he was in for another gush of tears. But the boy fought them back. Muldrew made up his mind that without the tears he would hear little of value—and the lad must be made to speak.

"Naturally," he said, "to walk into a room and see a knife sticking from a girl's breast, and all that blood ——"

"Don't! Oh, don't!" wailed the boy, gripping his fists against the sobs that shook his slim body. "It wasn't that. It was—it was—she's my cousin."

Muldrew sat up. "Your cousin—that dead girl in there?"

Bill nodded, biting his lip to keep back the tears.

"What's your name, Bill?"

"William Draycott. That's hers too—Draycott—Jenny Draycott. She ——"

"Draycott? Are you sure it's your cousin?"

"Of course I'm sure. She lives with mother and me in the Cullen Apartments. I ought to know my own cousin."

Muldrew thought it over. The clues were getting crossed—or were they simplifying?

"But she's already been identified as Miss Luscombe."

"That's silly," the boy exclaimed. "Gosh, I ought to know. Who said ——"

"She lives with you and your mother, does she? Did she come here to see you?"

"No—I don't see why she should. She can get me on the telephone. Besides, Mr. Jacoby didn't say she wanted me."

"Why do you think she was here, then, Bill?"

The boy shook his head, and his face darkened.

"She lives with you. Then her home isn't in the city?"

"No, sir. She's been here for two years, though. It's only since she lost her job she's lived with us. We really haven't room for her."

"What was her job, Bill?"

"Stenographer—or secretary, or something. . . . I don't see how she could have been much good; she didn't have any experience. But her last job was a good one—I mean, good pay. That's the one she lost six months ago."

"Whose secretary was she—at the last, I mean?"

"Mr. Dolan's."

Muldrew closed his eyes. "You mean Mr. Dolan, the lawyer?"

"Yes, sir. He fired her, I guess. She's been down on him like everything ever since. She used to say ——" He stopped and clamped his lips together. "I don't mean anything by that, sir," he went on after a moment. "Just lately she hasn't been so hard on him. Mother and I, we thought maybe she was going to get the job back. Anyway, she hasn't been looking for a job, we don't think, for a couple of months—as if she was waiting."

"Then I guess Doctor Blaney must have been

mistaken," Muldrew murmured. "He called her Miss Luscombe. By the way, Bill, was she hard up—in need of money?" He was thinking of the twenty-dollar bill.

"All I know is she hasn't paid a cent for her keep," Bill replied, but without rancour. "She got well paid with Mr. Dolan, I guess, but she didn't seem to have much left when mother took her in."

The boy screwed up his forehead and blinked across the lobby toward the reading-room. "It's funny, too, her being like that—looking like that, I mean. She never looked like that at home. . . . And those clothes! Mother would hate to see her all painted up that way. I can't think—what happened all of a sudden." He shook his head in a bewildered way.

"Did you ever hear her mention Doctor Blaney?"

"No, sir. . . . She never talked much—about herself, I mean."

"Nor about Doctor Thorensen, nor Mr. Forrest, nor Mr. Lansing, for instance?"

Bill regarded the detective as if he thought Muldrew had gone crazy.

"Why—no, sir. Why should she? Anyway, she never talked much to me. Maybe she did to mother; they roomed together. I have to sleep on the couch in the living-room. Did she—did she—know them?" He faced Muldrew excitedly. "Say, they were all here in the Club when she—when it happened!"

Muldrew gave no sign of having heard. "Tell me, Bill, did you see any of those men go into the visitors' room—after the murder, I mean?"

"I—I don't remember, sir. I just saw Mr. Jacoby hurrying in with Doctor Thorensen, and I knew something was up. I peeked in."

"Your mother will be home now, will she?" Muldrew asked.

"Yes, sir. At least, she was half an hour or so ago. I telephoned her; she knows. She was coming right down, but I told her she better not; there wasn't anything she could do, and I knew the police would be here."

Jacoby came through the doorway at the rear of the lobby and went behind the counter, where he began to fuss with a recently-delivered pile of mail.

Muldrew patted the boy on the shoulder. "You and I are going to get to the bottom of this, Bill. Stiffen up. Don't give the other boy a chance to sneer at you."

CHAPTER VIII

RECONNOITRING

MULDREW returned to the reading-room. Jimmy Dolan, seated just inside the door with Tiger Lillie, received him with a teasing smile. Muldrew nodded and went on. As he passed Wendell Forrest, still concealed behind the morning paper, he brushed into one of his extended hands. To Forrest's angry, protesting frown he returned a friendly apology and dropped into an empty chair at his side.

"That's all right, that's all right," Forrest growled, and once more disappeared behind the paper.

Muldrew cleared his throat. "Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Forrest, but you were one of the first to see the body of the girl there in the visitors' room, weren't you?"

"Who told you that?" Forrest turned and glared.

"Someone out there said so. Is it not so?" Muldrew's voice was calm and friendly.

"I—I don't know that I was one of the first. In fact, I distinctly remember that I wasn't. Three or four were there before me."

"May I ask who they were? You see, it's important to establish just how the body was placed. Jacoby, first to come on her, is excited—naturally; and Doctor Thorensen was concerned only with the professional end of it. But the body, as it is now, needs some explaining. I'm trying to establish if it was arranged that way by the murderer or later."

Forrest folded his paper in half. "Yes—of course." He thought for a moment. "I remember Jimmy Dolan was there—yes, and Lansing over there, and —and Shipman—he's the Club Secretary. Then there was Jacoby, of course, and Doctor Thorensen. I saw the excitement and went to see what it was all about. I didn't stay; it was too terrible. I can't—stand—blood." He drew a hand across his lips and shivered.

"It must have been upsetting for all of you," Muldrew agreed. "But the curiosity of some of the members, I suppose, overcame their repugnance. I notice that most of them continue to hang about the lobby."

"We're not all alike," Forrest snapped, and unfolded the paper again.

"Nobody knows that better than the police, Mr. Forrest. It's what complicates our work. Every murder introduces a new type of murderer—in some respect . . . and each murderer exhibits a new type of conscience. Symptoms mean nothing. If they were to be trusted —— It's such a particularly brutal murder. I can't imagine anyone but a fiend committing it. . . . And what fiend can the Wanderers' Club have among its members?"

Forrest surveyed him furiously. "What right have you to say it's a member?"

"The right of the police to suspect anyone. If my own brother came within the range of possibility I'd suspect him; I'd have to. In this case the possibilities go no farther than the Club members. If I'm wrong, correct me."

"Certainly you're wrong. At least," less confidently, "you might use more imagination. Anyone could get into that room and murder the girl. They could come in from the street, and no one in the building would be the wiser."

Muldrew beamed. "Say, I believe you're right! I'll look into that."

"Anyway," Forrest grunted, somewhat mollified, "murder isn't always so brutal—so undeserved, I mean. I mean, some victims get even less than they deserve. Of course," hastily, "I don't apply that to this case specifically; it's just a general statement. . . . But I saw that girl. She doesn't excite the pity she would if she wasn't so obviously—well, of a certain type."

"Would you take her to be—that sort of girl? Have you any reason ——"

Forrest made an impatient gesture. "Look at her make-up. A girl who cares to look like that—of course she's looking for men."

"And yet, come to think of it, isn't it the men make them like that?"

"Some women don't need to be made." Forrest shifted uneasily. "But I suppose one shouldn't talk that way about the dead. If you want to know—what you profess to want to know, why don't you ask those on the spot before I was?"

He turned his back, but Muldrew was not to be silenced.

"You mean Dolan and Lansing. Perhaps they, too, preferred not to linger—like you. I see they're here now; I noticed the three of you here when I looked into the room some time ago." He feigned not to notice the quick, suspicious glance Forrest threw at him.

"Why don't you talk to Jacoby—and Thorensen?"

"I have." Muldrew leaned back; one hand kept tapping the arm of his chair. "Of course, you're not all alike . . . but, judging from the effect on the three in this room now, I should conclude you three are much alike."

Forrest turned on him angrily. "What the hell are

you driving at? Jimmy Dolan and I alike!" His anger evaporated with suspicious swiftness. "Oh, well," with a wave of his hand, "Jimmy might feel the same about me. Only I should think a crime or two wouldn't disturb Jimmy; it's his job. He's been mixed up in the worst crimes in the city."

"Only as defending counsel, Mr. Forrest," Muldrew chided mildly. "Jimmy is mixed up with the criminals —legally—not with their crimes. . . . And often, if the juries are to be believed, they're not criminals, in spite of what the police say. Dolan has a remarkable record of success in that line."

"And," Forrest snorted, lowering his voice, "it doesn't matter whether they're guilty or innocent." He laughed harshly. "I suppose he'd say the same of me—it doesn't matter to me whether the properties I sell are worth the money or not. We're all under suspicion in the other fellow's eyes."

Muldrew thrust his open hand before Forrest's eyes. In it lay the twenty-dollar bill. "We found this in the murdered girl's hand."

Forrest stared down on it, and his cheeks reddened slowly. "That? Twenty dollars! She had that—in her hand?" His eyes moved from Dolan to Lansing and back again. They settled in turn on three freshly-arrived members. "Who'd she get that from?" he whispered.

"I'd give a lot to know." The suggestion of a smile fled across Muldrew's lips. . . . "Perhaps I should have made every man in this building look at her—before me. . . . For purposes of identity," he added, as Forrest started, and tried to cover it by fumbling with the newspaper.

"You mean," Forrest said, his lip curling, "for the purpose of identifying the one who would identify her."

"Then you agree with me that a member of the Club is involved."

"I—I didn't say that. Anyway, what does it matter what I think?"

"If we could get to the bottom of that twenty-dollar bill," Muldrew mused. "Of course, the man she came to see would be able to explain it."

A painful silence fell between them. Forrest spoke first, his voice low and tense:

"Who did she come to see?"

"I couldn't tell that—it wouldn't be fair. If she'd asked for you, now ——"

"Why should she ask for me?" Forrest demanded truculently.

"Why should a girl like that ask for any member of the Wanderers' Club?"

"But—but I never saw the girl before."

"No—of course not. But we tacitly agreed just now that no member of the Club would admit knowing her, didn't we? . . . We do happen to know who she asked for."

"Then you know it wasn't for me." Forrest's paper fluttered nervously. "I was here all the time. If I'd been wanted Jacoby would have told me. I saw him come to the door there and look in."

"Why should she ask for you—if you never saw her before? But you'd know what Jacoby came for—looking for someone who was wanted in the visitors' room."

Forrest opened his lips or some furious retort but thought better of it. "I've told you all I know," he said with forced indifference. "Is that enough?"

Muldrew professed not to have heard. "We also found out *why* she was here."

Forrest sat very still for a moment or two. "Well,"

he broke out petulantly, "what was it for — what was it?" The lump in his throat moved up and down.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Muldrew flushed consciously, as if he had spoken his thoughts aloud. "I've said more than I intended, I'm afraid. . . . In that case it's only fair to say who it was the girl did ask for. But I must request that the name be kept strictly to yourself. It was Doctor Blaney."

Forrest relaxed abruptly and sagged back in his chair with a stifled sigh. The paper fell to the floor, and, in confusion, he stooped to recover it.

"I don't see what good that is to you. A doctor—a patient—perhaps. . . . Or it might have been—anything."

"That's right—it seems to mean little—especially as Doctor Blaney was not in the building at the time. Still, there's this: might it not be taken as a symptom?"

Forrest rose to his feet. "You detectives are too deep for me. If you don't mind, I'll run along and eat."

He did, he almost ran from the room.

Muldrew watched him go with furrowed brows. A movement across the room drew his attention. Tiger Lillie had risen from the couch where he had been sitting with Jimmy Dolan and was strolling toward the upper end of the room where Lansing sat before a writing-desk. The Detective intercepted him.

"Better call it a day, Tiger. You've got more now than the late edition'll have time to set up. Trot along. . . . I'll read what you have to say about the murder with unusual interest."

"With unusual profanity, Gordy, you mean," Tiger laughed. "Just a jump ahead—what I told you. You'll learn something from the late edition ——"

"Perhaps that the murdered girl was once in the employ of Jimmy Dolan."

The reporter looked crushed. Muldrew patted him on the back.

"You do manage to unearth a tit-bit or two, Gordy. But be a good scout and don't tell *The Gazette* all you know. Now I'll have to rush. But keep your eye on *The Star*, my boy. Make it a habit. Our watchword: 'All the news that's fit to print—and we don't let the police decide what's fit.' Ah, a thought, Gordy, a thought."

He drew out a note-book, scribbled a few words, winked, and departed with a jaunty fling of his shoulders.

Muldrew turned to see Jimmy Dolan eyeing him with frank amusement.

"Impertinent young jackanapes, isn't he?" Dolan laughed. "But sometimes these reporters get a hunch."

Muldrew dropped into the couch at his side. "What's Tiger's special hunch this time?"

Dolan's answer was to prod his own chest and wink.

"Just why are you so interested in this murder, Jimmy? It took some time to get round to you—but I wasn't forgetting you."

The smile stiffened on Dolan's face. "What the hell do you mean? The only interest I take in a murder is professional. It's my business," malignantly, "to beat the police."

"It's always the business of the murderer—too," Muldrew said. "You choose your friends, Jimmy, but I didn't know you gloried in them. You've heard the axiom about touching tar."

He laughed into Dolan's angry eyes and left him, following the aisle between the great leather chairs to the end of the room. As he neared the desk where

Lansing bent over a sheet of paper the latter rose precipitately and left the room. Muldrew stopped beside the desk he had deserted and, leaning across it, seemed to be looking from the window. As he drew back he let his eyes drop to the great square of green blotter. Then he passed quickly from the room.

Out in the lobby he beckoned Bill Draycott to him.

"Bill, I want you to do something for me. Get the contents of the waste-paper basket beside the second desk from the far side of the reading-room and bring them to me. You can manage it without arousing suspicion. By the way, has Mr. Lansing left the building?"

"No, sir, he's back in the cloak-room, I guess."

"All right. I'll be in the back hall waiting. Hurry!"

The boy picked up a large waste-paper basket from the lobby and scuttled into the reading-room. Muldrew sauntered into the back hall. In a few seconds Bill was back and led down the stairs toward the kitchen quarters, where Muldrew up-ended the basket on the floor and scrabbled among the crumpled sheets of paper. Sheet after sheet he opened. Nothing but meaningless scrolls!

"Take them and burn them now," he ordered. Handing the boy a dime, he returned to the ground floor. Loud words at the front door sent him hurrying through the lobby. Phillips stood with his back to the door facing Lansing.

"I can't let you through, sir, without permission. Them's my orders."

Muldrew approached. "All right, Phillips. Let anyone go now. Sorry, Mr. Lansing, if you were inconvenienced." He smiled disarmingly into the frowning face Lansing turned on him. "I'd quite forgotten my orders. It's good you reminded me, for I was just leaving myself."

He opened the door and allowed Lansing to precede.

"A most unfortunate affair, this," he began conversationally. "Murder is always that, of course, but I mean the place where it happened this time. It must be a shock to the members of a Club like the Wanderers'."

"It's horrible!" Lansing burst out. "It's incredible that it should have happened there—right in the Club. No matter how it's explained, it will stand as a stain, a slur on the Club, for years. 'Shock' scarcely describes it. Why the murderer selected such a place —how he dare select it ——" Lansing's excitement had grown as he talked, until his voice was almost a squeak.

"How he found opportunity is what puzzles me," Muldrew broke in. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Lansing."

He turned back and said a few words to the policeman patrolling before the Club.

"I must remove the police as quickly as possible," he confided, as he fell into step once more at Lansing's side. "It doesn't look well—all these uniforms about the place—such a place as the Wanderers' Club. And yet, since the crime was committed there, that's the least of the Club's worries."

A significant silence fell between them. It was Lansing broke it.

"You don't think it—that a member is—involved?" he asked, trying to keep his voice level. "That's going a bit too far," indignation getting the better of him, "even for the police. If you'll permit me to say so—it's outrageous."

Muldrew ignored the challenge. "It's certainly a strange place for a crime—one like that, I mean. I'm wondering how it will look in the papers. It's the papers, rather than the police, the Wanderers' Club

has to fear. We'll make ourselves as inconspicuous as we can, consistent with proper precautions. No, it's the papers you have to fear."

"Me? What have I ——"

"Your Club, I mean. A woman there, too!"

He waited, but Lansing was silent. Muldrew asked the natural question himself.

"What was she doing there? That's what everyone will wonder."

"Why should they?" Lansing demanded hotly.

"In a man's Club?"

"But anyone can reach the visitors' room; that's what it's for. Sometimes our wives call for us."

"Miss—Luscombe was no member's wife," Muldrew said.

"No—no . . . I see you have her name already."

"We have much more than that: we have quite a bit of her history."

Lansing's eyes swivelled round to Muldrew without his head moving.

"Do you know, then, how she came to be there?"

"Yes. She wished to see—a Club member."

Again that strained silence before Lansing asked:

"You know who it was? But what does it matter? She could only have been there without the permission of the one she asked for. No Club member would risk bringing her there. Gossip enough about the place without that. So, you see, the one she asked for could not have known she was coming—he couldn't have been prepared to see her. We're careful at the Club—I mean, about appearances. . . . Of course, it might be quite innocent, her asking for someone."

"The point is," Muldrew said gravely, "*was* it quite innocent?"

"I don't see what right you have to suspect anything

else—unless you have proof." And still he did not ask the natural question.

Muldrew once more had to speak without a cue: "It was Doctor Blaney she asked for."

"Oh!" A choked, small voice.

"Yes, Doctor Blaney. He was her doctor, you see. She wished to see him."

Lansing's sagging shoulders lifted. "How fortunate! Doctor Blaney didn't come to the Club till some time after the murder. In fact, I looked for him myself just before—before we knew of the murder; I wanted a game of bridge before lunch."

Muldrew let him go at the corner, and Lansing strode down the street, his shoulders straight, his head high. The Detective stepped into a doorway, and when the way was clear he returned to the Club. He did not enter, but wandered over the lawn in front, poking into the shrubs, peering among the flowers. Inspector Armitage appeared in the doorway.

"Well, Muldrew, I wondered what had happened to you. What's the game you're playing now? Looking for footprints among the pansies—after the style of the best thrillers?"

Muldrew dusted his knees. "I'm looking for a knife-handle, Inspector. I won't find it here, of course, but I take no chances. You didn't notice—you didn't have the knife in your hand like I had—there were some dim scratches about the base of that handle—around the little flange there. . . . Jasper found no finger-prints because—well, because when it was driven into the girl's heart there was another handle over the one we see. The murderer took it away with him. Far better than gloves."

CHAPTER IX

A DELICATE SITUATION

"I UNDERSTAND, Mr. Shipman, that quite a few members make it a habit to visit the Club for mid-morning coffee."

"That's correct, Mr. Muldrew. A few months ago we got a new steward, and he's revolutionized the dining-room end. His coffee is one of our sources of revenue. A new coffee urn, a new brand of coffee, a new method of making it, new care—and a new steward—yes, and a new commissionaire—I mean, the man at the desk—we try to run the Club on English lines, you know—altogether they've worked wonders. The mid-morning coffee has become a rite."

Inspector Armitage, Muldrew, and Shipman, the Club Secretary, were seated in the latter's office at the Club.

"How many members have acquired the habit, may I ask?"

"The steward counts on not less than one hundred cups. Of course, some take two—now and then three. Sometimes it runs to a hundred and forty."

"How many members are in the building at that hour, as a rule?"

Shipman tilted his head thoughtfully. "M—m—that's difficult to say. It would run about fifty to seventy, I should say; perhaps a few more or less."

"So that there's nothing remarkable about a girl asking for a member between eleven and noon?"

"Nothing whatever—so far as the attendance is concerned. If she knew the member well enough—of course, you're speaking of the—the dead girl—if she knew the member well enough to be aware of his habits."

"And Doctor Blaney was one of the most regular of your morning coffee patrons?"

"He was—he is. It's a wonder he wasn't here ——"

"Yes, since he wasn't in the building at the time her visit can have no significance to the police."

"That's for the police to decide," Shipman replied non-committally.

"Then we can only conclude that had he been here as usual this murder would never have been committed —where and when it was."

Shipman looked bewildered. Muldrew explained:

"Because if he'd been here the murderer would not have had time to commit the crime. As it was, Jacoby would be away a long time making a search for the Doctor. It isn't a stretch of imagination to deduce that the murderer knew Doctor Blaney would not be here—at least, that he was not in the building."

"I don't quite follow ——"

"Of course," Inspector Armitage broke in, "the crime might have been carried through in two or three minutes; but whoever did it he saw, or knew when, Jacoby left the visitors' room. Plainly the murder was not committed on a moment's mad impulse. . . . I'd say someone arranged with the girl to come here this morning and ask for Doctor Blaney—it may not have seemed important whether he was here or not —and was prepared for her. All he had to do was to creep into the room the moment Jacoby was gone ——"

"You aren't suggesting, surely, that it was a member of the Club!" Shipman protested. "That's impossible!"

"I never knew a murder yet that hadn't a lot of impossible things about it," the Inspector returned dryly. "As I've said a thousand times, we're all potential murderers. If we were called on to chase only the possible suspects we'd never lose much sleep, I can tell you. And if we chased only the possible, there'd be no need of a public executioner."

"Yes—yes, of course." Shipman coughed and fidgeted. "I suppose your profession makes you—suspicious. But if it was a member—and I still think it's impossible—you've a long list to go through. There must have been fifty or sixty members here when the murder was committed—or when the body was found, I mean."

"If every murder was confined to sixty possibles, and all corralled like the sixty members of the Wanderers' Club at eleven-thirty this morning, the police would have a better record than they have," said the Inspector.

Muldrew asked: "Are you here all day, Shipman?"

The Secretary darted a glance at him. "Not all day. I try to be here from eleven to three, and during dinner. Those are the busy hours, the time when a Secretary is most needed. This is an honorary position, you understand, but I can spare the time." He talked fast and nervously.

"You were here at the time of the murder?"

"Do we know exactly when the murder was committed?" Shipman countered. "I was here when the body was found. I wasn't told of it—I didn't know immediately—only a moment or two before the police arrived. Jacoby did everything that needed to be done. He's the man at the desk out there—a very capable man."

"Humph!" the Inspector grunted. "Too damned capable! He did too much: he called up *The Star*."

Shipman's face reddened with anger. "He did that —called up the papers?"

"He says so. A man like that is wasted in an exclusive Club like this; he should be advance-man for a circus. I think Jacoby considers it the one brainy thing he did."

"I'll take that up with him," Shipman snarled.

"Where were you when you were told of the murder?" Muldrew asked.

"Why—why—here—in my office, I think. No—no, I believe I was in the cardroom checking up the supplies with our man there."

"Who told you?"

Shipman ran his hand up his forehead into his hair. "I don't—remember. It's been such a rush since—so much excitement and worry."

Muldrew let it rest there, but across the room the Inspector watched him intently.

"Jacoby," Muldrew remarked, "seems to be an unusually intelligent man. Where does he come from?"

"I couldn't tell you that. He's been with us about six months. A most efficient man, I always thought. I'm surprised he so far forgot himself ——"

"Where was he before he came here?"

Shipman did not answer for a moment. "I don't believe I ever knew that. He came highly recommended — I remember that distinctly — and I gave him a trial. From the start he seemed the right man in the right place."

"Who recommended him?"

The Secretary looked startled. "Why—several of the members—three or four, I believe. . . . It was Jimmy Dolan spoke of him first. That's the man you should ask about Jacoby. One or two others spoke of him. . . . If I remember rightly, Wendell Forrest

was one—and Harry Lansing. We're careful in selecting our staff, but with recommendations like that I knew he must be an unusual man. . . . I recall that I was surprised that a man like that would accept without protest the wages we offer. It isn't that we don't pay our staff well, but this type of man, he's never satisfied. Jacoby never said a word. I understood when I learned he has a modest income of his own.

"Another thing about Jacoby: we've never had a commissionaire—a clerk, I mean—who stood in so well with the members. Indeed, they treat him almost as one of themselves. I've seen them insist on his sitting down and taking a cup of coffee with them—though I stopped that. He has a great fund of stories, too, and he tells them well."

They conversed for a few minutes longer.

"Would you mind," Muldrew asked, "if we got Doctor Blaney in here? I'd like to see him alone, and that's impossible anywhere else about the building. It wouldn't be fair to force on him more publicity. Would you mind stepping out and asking him quietly to come to us here?"

The moment the door closed Muldrew, motioning the Inspector to stand guard, ran to another door that opened to the left. He tried the knob, but the door was locked. Then he saw the key and, turning it softly, tried again. A bolt on the other side rattled. Footsteps in the lobby sent him scurrying back to his chair.

So that by the time Doctor Blaney burst into the room, a table-napkin in one hand, indignant and protesting, Inspector Armitage was absorbed in an etching that hung beside the door.

"I'm sorry, Doctor," Muldrew apologized, "but I knew you'd be leaving soon. I wanted just a word or two, and I thought you'd prefer it here to anywhere

else. It will save your time and ours, as well as publicity that must be annoying to a man like you. Won't you sit down ? "

Blaney flopped into a chair, only half pacified. With a laugh he noticed the napkin he carried and flung it on a bookcase.

" Please make it snappy," he said. " I've an appointment in less than an hour. If necessary, of course, I might postpone it."

" Perhaps you'd better," Muldrew said.

Blaney picked up the telephone and dialled a number with a swiftness that was the expression of his impatience.

" Miss Parks, please get Mrs. Anderson on the telephone and ask her to come later. Say this afternoon at four. I might be delayed. Thank you."

He hung up the telephone and lounged back. His eye fell on a box of cigars on the Secretary's desk and, with a grin, he helped himself. " Probably a Club expense, anyway," he laughed. " Do you gentlemen smoke ? " He pushed the box across. " Have one on the Club. I don't happen to have any of my own."

Neither of the detectives accepted the invitation.

" All right, what can I do for you ? " the doctor asked, in a business-like tone.

" We thought," Muldrew began, " you might be able to explain how it was Miss Luscombe, the murdered girl, asked for you in the visitors' room ? "

Blaney almost leaped from his chair. " Me ? Asked for me ? Why the devil would she do that ? Not a glint of excuse that I know of. I've told you all I knew of her." He paused to draw the light into the cigar. " You're sure it was me she asked for ? Did Jacoby say that ? "

" No one else could know."

" But I don't see—I can't understand why she

should ask for *me*. If she wished further treatment, why come here for it? I've never seen her except at the office. Anyway, got up like that there'd be no more free treatments from me."

Inspector Armitage asked: "How would she know where to find you at that hour?"

"I'm asking myself that. As a matter of fact," he admitted, "most of us would prefer that our mid-forenoon visits here were not known. It's one of our bad habits—not only a waste of time, but the coffee can't do us much good. Still, we can afford it. . . . But how she'd know ——" He reached again for the telephone. "Perhaps Miss Parks, my nurse, told her. If Miss Luscombe was in a hurry ——"

Muldrew stopped him as he started to dial. "It isn't necessary. All that matters is that she *did* know —and it's not important how she came to know. What puzzles me more than that is how she came to have this clutched in her hand."

He held up the twenty-dollar bill. Blaney's eyes widened.

"Why—why, I never thought she had a dollar to her name, or, you can bet, I wouldn't have given her my time for nothing. It's on a par with the way she was dressed, too." He laughed. "I seem to have come on the scene too late: perhaps she brought it to pay me—she'd come into money, or something. At my regular rate she'd still owe me ten dollars, but I wouldn't refuse twenty I never expected to see. If that looks good to you, then the money's mine." He extended his hand, with a low laugh. "Of course—no such luck."

His cigar had gone out, and he dropped it in the tray and helped himself to another.

"Then you can tell us no more, Doctor?" Muldrew asked.

"I only wish I could. This thing cuts us up pretty badly—the Club here. There'll be a lot of nasty talk. I hope you find the murderer in a hurry. If that's all, I'll get back to my caramel pudding."

Shipman must have been waiting, for he entered immediately. He looked a little anxious.

"I hope you don't plan to put all the members who were in the building through the third degree, Inspector."

"There's no third degree here," the Inspector reproved. "It's up to Muldrew—he has the case; but I don't imagine he'd find that profitable."

"At least I'm through with you, Shipman—and the Club, too, for the moment."

As they passed out to the street Muldrew clacked his lips. "I don't know if you thought of it, sir, but that locked door I tried in the Secretary's office opens directly into the visitors' room. And it wasn't bolted on the other side an hour and a half ago."

CHAPTER X

FORESTALLED

"I DON'T know how it looks to you, Muldrew," the Inspector growled, "but there's a lot about this that has me guessing. I thought at first the murderer might have crept in behind her and throttled her before she knew he was there. But that twenty-dollar bill's a puzzler. I believe it plays an important part—if we can only get at it. Whatever her purse seems to tell us, that crime was never committed for robbery ——"

"I'd like to know, nevertheless, who it was went through her purse—and why," Muldrew deliberated.

"If it wasn't the murderer—well, we can trace everyone else who was in the room."

"But is that going to tell us what we want to know? There may be wheels within wheels. I seem to sense a certain reluctance to speak out—and that protects not only the murderer but anyone else connected with the girl."

"Of course," the Inspector said, "we've no real proof that her purse *was* gone through. The fact that no outcry was heard means nothing. Not only was her breath cut off, but any noise she might have made would scarcely escape from that tight room, or it would have been drowned by the passing traffic. . . . Shipman would be the only one likely to hear—and he provides an alibi right away by assuring us he was not in his office—at least, when the murder was reported to him."

"Shipman," Muldrew declared, "is an uncomfortable man . . . and he doesn't know yet that we're interested in that connecting door. He's definitely in the list of suspects."

"Why didn't you fire it at him—about the door, I mean?"

"Because it's one of the many details that must be approached with caution, sir. There's a lot I want first to link up more definitely before I test the strength of the chain I'm forging. I don't want Shipman to be warned in time to establish a more convincing alibi. . . . So many people, who do not appear to be connected, poke themselves into this affair, and I've got to establish that connection. There's Forrest, and Lansing, and Jimmy Dolan ——"

"What in the world?" puzzled the Inspector.

"You didn't pry about as I did, sir, or you'd have seen three men—only three—sitting in the reading-room at the very height of the excitement. Is that natural—especially as everyone else was in the lobby discussing the crime? Those three—or two of them—were reading the morning papers, or they appeared to be. Dolan was his usual teasing, supercilious self."

The Inspector squinted at an overhanging sign. "I can picture a man so sensitive that he would run from blood . . . but if they were reading, that's different. And there's nothing sensitive about Dolan."

"It all checks up, sir," Muldrew elaborated, "with the fact that anyone in that building could reach the visitors' room by way of the front hall without attracting attention; and he could return the same way. A score might see him and not notice. Add to that the fact that the lobby is often empty."

Neither spoke for some time. Then Muldrew:

"There are only two conditions to consider about the crime itself, as I see it: either the murderer had

everything planned, even to the time and purpose of the girl's visit, or he found everything exactly opportune for the crime. The latter is improbable—it can be ignored. Then the whole affair was planned. The murderer could never hope for the opportunity to offer without preparation. He had to prevent an outcry, murder the girl, adjust the body, and escape before Jacoby returned."

"Do you believe all Jacoby says?" the Inspector asked.

"I don't believe all anyone says—least of all Jacoby. He's not the least of our puzzles. That's why I handled him so gently. I'm most anxious he shouldn't suspect that we're inquisitive about him beyond the evidence he gives. Jacoby is a clever man, too clever for that job. Shipman's explanation about the personal income isn't enough."

The Inspector chuckled. "I wondered what you'd think of Jacoby. Did you notice his hands? Hands soft and pliable as his have been useful for more important jobs than sorting letters. Those muscular palms, the deep creases, the flexible fingers—well, I'd hate to stack up against him at a card-table."

"I saw it, sir." Muldrew nodded several times. "But what interested me most was the curious surge of emotions he was always battling. I don't know yet what it means. Sometimes it resembled blazing fury, then cunning, then a real desire to help us, and then again a false simplicity he could not sustain against the other emotions. At any rate, he's excited and trying to hide it. Yes, Jacoby will be a fruitful field before we're through with him."

"And what's the next step?" the Inspector asked. "Seems to me we ought to chase up something more about the girl. That's the way to get at the origin of the crime, don't you think?"

"There's her aunt," Muldrew suggested. He told of Bill Draycott. "But I'd suggest that we tackle first the Luscombe side. That girl had a life distinct from her aunt and cousin, and it's about that the crime is woven. . . . A girl with an alias—m—m! I'll telephone."

Muldrew entered a store. In a couple of minutes he was back, a deep frown lining his forehead. In his hand he held the rent receipt found in the purse.

"It's her apartment, all right, sir. I talked to the janitor. I didn't mention the murder. If you're willing, sir, we'll go there first. What there is to learn about the Luscombe side of her won't be found at her aunt's. Too bad we let the car go."

They boarded a street car and seated themselves in a retired corner.

"We've this to face," the Inspector reflected: "the murderer can't have been rushed for time. There's that misplaced calendar to explain. That was done before the murder, therefore the girl must have known he was in the room."

They puzzled over it.

"It might mean," Muldrew ventured, "that the girl was not alarmed by the murderer wishing not to be seen by anyone else in the Club. She knew him, and he seemed to offer no immediate danger. Naturally no member of that Club would wish to be seen in the room with the girl, whether he planned her murder or not. Whatever they had in common had to be kept secret. She'd have no suspicion how she played into his plans by letting him cover that little window. But, however we look at it, the murderer must have taken a great risk remaining after the crime to adjust the body to make it seem lifelike. That's why I feel convinced he didn't stop to go through her purse."

"At any rate," said the Inspector, "he couldn't hope

to delay discovery after Jacoby returned to the room."

"By that time he counted on being safely away. Knowing Blaney was not in the Club—I wish we knew how he knew—he could figure on the time Jacoby would take in searching for the Doctor. Another absolute proof that the murder was planned is the second handle to the knife. Thus it filters down to this: the murderer knew the girl would be there—she would ask for a member who was *not* there—and the murderer was prepared for her. There's no chance that I can see of discovering why she asked for Doctor Blaney."

He had taken the knife from his pocket, and the two detectives examined it together.

"There—you see something has slid over that ledge and gripped it tightly—something wooden or metal; and the fit is too close to be anything but another handle. To withdraw the outer handle without disturbing the knife the murderer must have held the knife by that narrow ledge, too narrow for his finger-prints to be of any use to us. Leaving the knife in the wound, he was convinced, would forestall any suspicion we might have of another handle. Here we are, sir; we'll get down."

They found the Chalfont Apartments, a three-story structure of chaste design and with a distinct air of exclusiveness, one of the better-class type where references are usually demanded. The two detectives looked it over with surprise.

"And she was being treated by Blaney as a charity patient!" sniffed the Inspector. "One hundred and fifty a month, that receipt said. Paid by someone else, of course. It explains the whitewash on her face."

Muldrew continued to look the building over, and

at the end turned to the entrance with a shaking head. They passed through an arch at the side of the building into a well-kept grassy court broken by flower-beds. An examination of the letter-boxes told them that the janitor's quarters were in the basement. In answer to the bell a large man with a protruding paunch came puffing up from the basement. The Inspector introduced himself.

"We want to get into Miss Luscombe's apartment."

The janitor looked worried and confused. "But—but I don't see how I can let you. Miss Luscombe is not in ——"

"Miss Luscombe will never be in again. She's dead!"

The janitor was too phlegmatic for his stupidity to have degrees. Inspector Armitage might as well have mentioned threatening rain, for all the immediate effect it had.

"Dead! You don't say! Dear me! And such a pretty girl!"

He started up the stairs, dragging himself by the iron railing. On the floor above he inserted a key in a door.

"Dead, you say!" he repeated, as he stood aside to let them enter. "Well, I declare. Now, how long ago would that be?"

"This morning," the Inspector replied shortly, and passed into the entrance-hall. "By the way, are these furnishings hers?"

"No, sir, this is a furnished apartment."

"How long has she had it?"

"She paid the third month's rent only this morning —in advance; we always get it in advance."

"You're in luck this time. Did she live here alone?"

The janitor cleared his throat. "Fact is, she didn't stay around here much at all."

"I asked you if she lived here alone," the Inspector repeated sharply.

"Certainly—of course. Miss Luscombe," with a show of dignity, "wasn't one of them girls. We don't allow them in the building. This is a respectable ——"

"But she had visitors."

"Yes—certainly—visitors. A girl like that ——"

"Men or women?"

"Well—er—well, as far as I know, mostly men. In fact, I don't remember a woman at all, but I'm down in the basement most of the time. I don't bother about the visitors."

"No, you're too respectable," muttered the Inspector.

The two detectives passed from room to room, opening drawers and cupboards and clothes closets. The Inspector came to the kitchen.

"Where does that door lead?"

"It's the tradesmen's entrance."

"So that anyone can get in and out by that entrance and never go near the front entrance—or into the court?"

"Yes, sir. It opens on a lane at the other side. I guess—I guess it's the way some of Miss Luscombe's visitors came and went. There were times when I heard voices from the apartment, or I saw a light, and neither Miss Luscombe nor anyone else had come in by the front entrance. We can see it from our apartment in the basement."

"So that, without hearing voices or seeing a light here, you've no way of knowing when Miss Luscombe was in or out." The Inspector turned his back and continued the search.

It yielded nothing of importance at first. Beyond two dresses hanging in a clothes closet and a slim supply of other clothing in a dresser drawer the apartment was bare of everything but its own

furnishings. Inspector Armitage picked over the clothing in the drawer.

"Whatever she was at home with her aunt, here she was the grand lady. I can't afford clothes like this for my wife. Found anything, Muldrew?"

Muldrew shook his head. "Nothing." He stood in the centre of the one bedroom that appeared to be used. "I've a feeling this apartment plays an important role—part of a deliberate scheme. Either the address, since it was left in her purse, was a blind, to lead us where we'd get more deeply involved in mystery, or it was intended to appear to explain her dual life, her dual personality—a kept girl. With that explanation—well, I'm not going to accept it —yet. . . . There's just a possibility that the girl carried the address so that if anything happened to her we'd have a clue ——"

"Do you think she was afraid something might happen to her?" the Inspector puzzled.

"It's just a thought. It seems to be discounted by the fact that there's not a glint of enlightenment in the apartment. It's as clean as if someone suspected her plan and got here ahead of us."

"There was someone here not more'n an hour or so ago," the janitor said. "A man. I didn't see him, so he must have come in by the tradesmen's entrance, because I've been at the flowers all morning. But I saw a man pass the window here. I didn't pay much attention."

They plied him with questions, the result being that the time was definitely set for a few minutes after the noon hour. Muldrew repeated his round of the rooms, more uneasy now, impatient and fuming. The result was the discovery, on a high shelf in one of the clothes closets, of the one cheap garment in the apartment, a cotton crepe dress. He held it up.

"I think her aunt would recognize this. It explains one thing that has bothered me. The girl had to come here in her poorer clothes. She entered by the tradesmen's entrance to escape observation, and when she had changed to one of her grander dresses she was free to leave by any door she preferred. It maintained her double existence without exposure."

As they walked down the street toward the cars the two detectives were silent. On the street car Muldrew said:

"Jenny Luscombe was involved in some great adventure. What that adventure was I have to uncover. The man who visited her apartment an hour ago knew of her death; he went through the apartment to make sure of no revealing clues. . . . Someone had good reason for getting rid of her, reason enough to develop the plot that cost her her life, reason enough to carry it through under unusual and unusually dangerous conditions. . . . Now I'll see what the girl's aunt can tell us."

CHAPTER XI

A YOUTHFUL ALLY

But the Draycott apartment, in the Cullen Apartments, where the murdered girl lived with cousin and aunt, was not yet to figure in the case. Muldrew always blamed himself for that, though reason told him there was much else more pressing at the time. It waited —and gave to the case of Jenny Luscombe its second tragedy.

Without taking time to eat, Muldrew returned alone to the Wanderers' Club.

Jacoby was not in the lobby when he entered, for which he was glad. There was much to say to Jacoby, many questions to ask, but those, too, might well be delayed until a more intelligible picture formed in the detective's mind. So many discoveries, so many fresh suspicions, so many hitherto unnoticed clues, might alter the form of those questions to bring more productive replies. Jacoby was not a man to tackle unprepared.

Shipman, the Secretary, met him in the lobby and beckoned him into his office.

"There's just one thing, Mr. Muldrew, I'd ask of the police," he said, hurried and uneasy. "Can't you keep your investigations more secret? Is there any need to be running in and out half a dozen times a day? If you wish to see anyone who was here I can

give you their addresses. The members of the Wanderers' Club are too well known ——"

"Not too well known to be mixed up in a murder."

Shipman controlled himself with difficulty. "That has yet to be proved. All these police around, and you passing in and out — it's brought a horde of reporters about the place. And I've got in wrong with them because I won't — I can't answer all their questions."

"In fact," Muldrew laughed, "you were quite rude to them, and you want me to help you out."

"Well, I showed them the door in double-quick time, I tell you. These premises are private ——"

"Private enough even for murder. That's why the visitors' room of the Wanderers' Club was chosen for the crime—as carefully as the knife that did it."

Shipman held his teeth tightly together for a moment before replying. "At any rate, the newspapers can make it very nasty for us. There was a reporter —said he was a friend of yours—Louis Bracken, of *The Gazette* ——"

"Yes, I know Bracken. He writes that 'Kolum.'"

"He was insistent, even impudent. He said you let Tiger Lillie all over the place ——"

"I didn't let him. I had nothing to do with Tiger. Indeed, I sent him away, though it wasn't any business of mine. Don't worry—the newspapers won't rough-house the Wanderers' Club. There are too many advertisers among the membership for any newspaper to risk it. You may let your mind rest on that score, Shipman."

"But," Shipman said plaintively, "we hoped to keep it out of the papers entirely."

"May I ask how? Did you think the police would lend themselves to that? We don't play favourites, Shipman—even for the Wanderers' Club. . . . All

the more so when it looks as if the murderer was right here in the building—and that means a member. Is that clear ? "

" But haven't I the right to exclude reporters ? "

" Certainly."

" I found Tiger Lillie prowling about upstairs. He had Dr. Thorensen cornered, and the Doctor didn't know how to get rid of him."

" The Doctor wouldn't," Muldrew chuckled. " Glass houses. But, Shipman, I'm behind you in a wish to have as little said publicly about the crime as possible. At this stage nothing is to be gained by publicity. Indeed, I'd say —— "

A knock sounded on the door, and immediately it opened and Tiger Lillie thrust his red head in.

" I just wanted to ask, Shipman, if that door at the end of the visitors' room —— Oh, hello, Gordy ! " He winked. " You following me around ? All right, keep your eyes on me ; I'll find the clues for you." He entered and nodded toward the door that had interested Muldrew. " Yes—I see. Then you couldn't have been here when —— "

Shipman, his face livid with rage, was on his feet. But something else, too, showed in his stammering tongue and staring eyes.

" What's that—what's that—you say ? " Then, with a rush : " What do you mean, you impertinent puppy ? You—you —— "

" Immature Alsatian, or overgrown Boston bull," Tiger put in. " Be more definite, Shipman ; name the breed. Kamerad ! Kamerad ! Muldrew won't let you slay me, will you, Gordy ? "

Shipman wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, swallowing all the time. " I don't know," he whined, dropping into his chair, " I can't think what you're talking about. You come in here, walk right in —— "

"After knocking," Tiger reminded him. "I'm most punctilious—for a puppy."

"You come in here and pester us to death. It's not fair, it's not fair." Shipman, had he been a woman, might have wept. As it was his hands clenched and opened, clenched and opened.

Muldrew intervened, though the scene was not without its value to him. "You'd better toddle along, Tiger. Mr. Shipman and I are busy. I'll be here most of the afternoon, and I don't wish to be interrupted. The Club doors are closed to reporters for the rest of the day."

Tiger looked into his friend's eyes. "All right, that goes with me. Only when a man asks a civil question —and Shipman jumped off the deep end—well, it makes a wise reporter put two and two together and ask other questions he daren't ask aloud. You just read the last edition of *The Star*, Shipman—a special. It'll be an eyeful."

He disappeared; they could hear him whistling across the lobby to the front door. Shipman started from his chair, but Muldrew stopped him. The Secretary looked at him with helpless, appealing eyes.

"But he mustn't do that, Mr. Muldrew, he mustn't. Such a respectable Club—the best people in the city. Just because the murder happened to be committed here ——"

"Almost as if the girl had a spite against you," Muldrew put in solemnly.

The Secretary dropped into the chair, his hands working.

"That's what I've had to face all day—and it's just commenced — just because a woman got herself murdered in a part of the Club that's open to anyone on the street. There'll be reporters all the time, damn 'em!"

"Let's hope the time won't be long, Shipman. We may find the murderer before the reputation of the Club is ruined."

"Do you think you'll—find him—soon?" Shipman inquired eagerly.

"I'll find him within a day or two—or not at all . . . if I'm not interfered with."

"Then you suspect—you have real evidence—clues I don't know about?"

"I didn't know you knew of *any*. Neither Inspector Armitage nor I have consulted with anyone about the evidence. If it's any consolation, Shipman, I'm not going to make myself more conspicuous about the Club than I consider necessary. As for the uniformed police, they'll go immediately. . . . You can play your part by keeping me out of sight."

"Whatever I can do ——"

"Send in Bill Draycott, the bell-boy."

Shipman bent nearer. "What has he to do with it?"

"The murdered girl was his cousin. She lived with him and his aunt."

The Secretary's mouth opened and remained open for several seconds. "But—but she didn't ask for him—it wasn't Bill she came to see. You said so—Jacoby said so. . . . I'll get the boy."

He left the room almost on the run. Bill came in, trembling, with signs of tears still on his face. He stopped just inside the door, his head hanging.

"All right, Bill. You've nothing to be afraid of. Come here and sit down." Muldrew pointed to a chair. "I just wanted to have a little talk with you, Bill, and I don't want anyone to hear. . . . Bill, I want you to help me."

The boy lifted his head, and a flash of shy eagerness showed in his face.

"Yes, sir, I'd like to help. Gee, I'd like to.

Jenny—Jenny—I liked her a lot." He fought back a sob.

"Then that's fine. We're team-mates now. Bill, I need you. First of all, you're going to tell me all you know about your cousin. That's how I'm going to trace her murderer. Remember, you're working with the police now."

Muldrew turned his head sharply. A slight sound from beyond the door to the visitors' room had reached him. He leaped up and tip-toed to the door. But he did not touch the knob; he knew it was bolted on the other side. Instead he went to the lobby door and opened it. A few members were gathered in one corner of the room, while two or three others passed in and out the door to the stairway and cloakroom. Muldrew returned to the Secretary's office and closed the door. He moved his chair closer to the boy's.

"First of all, Bill, are there times in the day when the lobby is empty?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There are only two bell-boys on at a time, and Mr. Jacoby is all around the building. He's almost like a member himself; we've often talked about it—so different from the last one, the other boys say. I wasn't here then. I've only been here two months."

"How did you come to take up this work, Bill?"

The boy peered into the detective's face. "Don't you think it's a good job, sir? Mother doesn't like me here, but it looked good when there wasn't anything else to do."

"How did you get the job?"

"Why—why, yes, it was Jenny got it for me."

The answer startled Muldrew; he had been feeling in the dark, yet confident that in Bill might be found answers to some of the questions that puzzled him.

"How could she get you on here?" he asked.

"She didn't exactly get me on, I don't suppose, but she asked me why I didn't try for a job here. Goodness knows where it might lead, she said. So I applied, and Mr. Jacoby took me right on."

"He had a place for a bell-boy, had he?"

"No—o, not exactly a vacancy, there wasn't. He fired a boy and took me on. He said he liked my looks."

Muldrew was glad he had delayed cross-questioning Jacoby.

"Did your cousin know Mr. Jacoby?"

"I don't know—I don't think so. I never heard her mention him—or him her. . . . Say, I never thought of them knowing each other," he said, peering up excitedly into the detective's face. "I can't think she did know him. . . . But Jenny knew a lot of people mother and I never saw."

"What do you mean—a lot of people? Men?"

Bill nodded hesitatingly. "Yes—mostly men. They used to call her up at the apartment."

"Do you remember any names?"

"They never gave any names. If she wasn't in they rang off, or left a number or a nickname for her to call up." He jerked himself to his feet excitedly. "Say, I remember one of them telephone numbers—I mean, I remember—something. Mother and I used to wonder about all those calls. So one time I went all through the telephone book till I found the number that was left for her to call, and—and the name was—Miss Luscombe!"

Muldrew felt that he was getting somewhere. "Do you remember the address?"

Bill shook his head. "Some apartment building, I think. She never called anyone up from our apartment. When a number was left for her to call she always went out. That's what made mother and me worry.

But when mother spoke to her Jenny got so mad she never did it again. You just couldn't ask her anything. She was awful touchy."

Muldrew thought it over, fixing every detail in his mind.

"Tell me something about her last job, Bill."

"I don't know of anything more than I told you, Mr. Muldrew," the boy replied unhappily. "Mr. Dolan fired her—and she was so mad at him. Sometimes she threatened she'd tell the police things she learned when she was in his office. She said she could put the police on to a thing or two. Mother and I, we didn't know what she meant, except Mr. Dolan is always against the police."

"Mr. Dolan," Muldrew said, "is a criminal lawyer. It's his business to defend those the police charge with crime. . . . As his secretary, your cousin would learn much of his methods—or, at least, of the men he defended."

Bill straightened, his little face alive with cunning. "Then, if she could do things like that, wouldn't it be just too bad for Mr. Dolan? He wouldn't dare let her tell, would he?"

The path of the boy's thoughts was so evident that Muldrew laughed. "Bill, you're on the way to be a detective yourself. Only you must learn not to jump to conclusions like that. I can see you're going to be a real help. . . . Did you know your cousin had another address?"

"Why—no. Oh, I see, the address I found in the telephone book." His small face darkened. "Then, if she could afford another room, why couldn't she pay at our place? Mother and I, we've been keeping her for six months without a penny, because she was out of a job. Or was it—was it ——" He flushed and dropped his eyes—"was she—that sort—of a girl?"

"No, Bill, I don't believe she was. There's more in it than that. That's why I want your help. We want to find out what that second apartment, and her other name, meant. Where did she get the money, and how? . . . Bill, you're a smart boy. I want you to keep your eyes and ears open here about the Club —everywhere—it doesn't matter who it is or what happens. Mr. Dolan, of course, is interesting. The members will talk about the murder, they're sure to. I want to know all they say, and who says it. Everyone, mind. . . . Yes, even Mr. Jacoby. And if ——"

He rose swiftly and made for the door. Throwing it open, he looked about. Three or four small groups were there still, smoking and chatting. Nearest the door were Jacoby and Lansing. They shifted nervously to face the Detective.

Jacoby approached.

"Oh, Mr. Muldrew, I was just coming to ask if you were through with Bill. One of the boys has gone home sick, and we need Bill badly."

CHAPTER XII

OFFICIAL LARCENY

MULDREW entered the marble entrance of the Cosgrave Building with lagging steps. The elevator starter greeted him familiarly.

"Who is it this time, Mr. Muldrew? Honest, I haven't done anything ——"

"There are sins of omission, you know, Darlish."

"Yeah? But you leave that for the small boys. Come across, Mr. Muldrew. Give us warning in time to collect the rent before you run any of our tenants in."

"I'm not always on the offensive, Darlish. With a building full of lawyers, why not see in me a client—a mere client?"

Darlish chuckled. "A whole lot of lawyers in this building see in you a good many clients. You're the life of the legal profession, you police. Look at Mr. Dolan. He ——"

"I'm going right up now to look at Mr. Dolan," Muldrew said, and stepped into a waiting elevator.

Darlish got in the last word: "Most of us come to it sooner or later," he called, as the door slid shut.

Muldrew alighted on the seventh floor and looked about him. A dozen doors were in sight, and at the ends of the corridor in which he stood smaller halls led into other wings. A flight of stairs curled round the elevator shaft from top to bottom, and there were, he knew, other stairs as fire-escapes at either end.

It was not the first time the detective had been in Dolan's office, but this time he opened the door with little of his customary assurance. The interview ahead held no attractions for him. It was fraught with danger and offered little hope of reward. Muldrew was conscious of entering a battle unprepared, yet he dare not delay. Certain weapons he would have liked were denied him because he had no time to find them and knew not where to look for them.

In the outer office four clerks and stenographers sat about, so deeply absorbed in their tasks that Muldrew knew immediately that a moment ago they were idle. Everything in the room sparkled. The expensive woodwork of the walls and furniture was freshly polished and dusted, and the prevailing order was so impressive as to be unbusinesslike. A wind might have blown through the room and disturbed nothing but the hair of the three girls.

An impressive room that grew more impressive with each passing moment. Order — silence — work. Efficiency that was depressing, formidable.

That was Jimmy Dolan—a stage-manager, bearing down on his clients from the moment they entered his office, impressing them, stifling their enthusiasms, belittling—that the small, round man beyond the door of the inner office might be established from the start.

One other feature of the outer office did not escape Muldrew—the ugliness of the three girls. The detective had never seen such a sexless, unappealing group of girls. Clever of Jimmy Dolan : a girl like that had few temptations, either to talk or marry. Muldrew thought of Jenny Draycott's pretty face and wondered. The girl had been fired, to be sure, but why had she been engaged, with the girls before him as a model of the qualifications Dolan demanded in his female staff ?

When Muldrew had stood at the dividing-counter

several uncomfortable seconds the nearest stenographer deigned to raise her head.

"Yes, sir?"

"Is Mr. Dolan in?"

"Mr. Dolan is engaged." The girl glanced at the sheet lying on the desk at her right hand. "Have you an appointment?"

"No, but ——"

"I'm afraid Mr. Dolan won't be able to see you. He leaves in a few minutes—a directors' meeting, I believe. Unless you have an appointment ——"

"I won't keep him long. My name is Muldrew. I think he'll see me if you give him my name."

A flicker of interest showed in the girl's face, a definiteness of focus missing before. But she did not pass his name through to the inner office.

Muldrew seated himself as near the counter as he could get.

"It's all right," he said amiably. "Don't interrupt him. I'll wait."

He was glad of the interval. He needed time to arrange his thoughts, to sort out his questions, to plan the campaign he had formed, vaguely as yet, in his mind. Besides, he saw a possibility that there might be information to be dragged from this outer office of Dolan's as well as from Dolan himself.

The leading criminal lawyer of the city had evidently selected his staff with care. The necessary secrecy of such a business depended on the staff almost as much as on Dolan himself. In his profession criminality had more than a vicarious place. By hook or crook crime must be condoned and the criminal protected from the law he had outraged. Lawyers like Jimmy Dolan had one task—to defeat the law.

As Muldrew turned these thoughts over in his mind he became conscious that the stenographer beyond the

counter glanced now and then in his direction. But he paid no attention. Presently she collected a cluster of sheets, clipped them together, and looked at the office clock.

"I'm afraid your wait will be useless," she said. "Mr. Dolan is due almost immediately at a business meeting."

"It isn't really very important," Muldrew returned, with a show of indifference. "At least, it's not pressing. It's only about Miss Draycott."

From the girl's manner Muldrew was convinced that she knew nothing as yet of Jenny Draycott's murder. The stenographer stiffened, and her lips formed a tight line.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. Mr. Dolan is not apt to be interested. Miss Draycott worked in this office—for a short time . . . several months ago." Evidently Jenny Draycott's beauty had won her anything but favour in this sour group. "Mr. Dolan—got rid of her."

"Yes, so she tells me."

"She would," the girl sniffed. "She's tried everything to get back." She looked guiltily about and continued in a lower voice: "I can tell you she hasn't a chance—if that's why you want to see Mr. Dolan."

"To tell you the truth," Muldrew admitted, in a burst of confidence, "that is why I'm here. You say she has tried everything. What did she do?"

But the stenographer had said enough, and Muldrew knew better than to press her. While he considered how best to approach what was in his mind the door to the inner office opened and Dolan appeared, hat in hand. At sight of Muldrew he stopped short, and an uneasy look crossed his round face. Then he laughed quizzically.

"Lying in wait, as usual, Muldrew. You're a wise bird. If I'd known you were out here I'd have gumshoed out the other door. I'll have to leave orders that I'm to be warned when the police are on my trail. I keep two doors for purposes like that."

Muldrew only laughed. "I'm surprised you neglected such a simple precaution long ago—in your profession. I had a higher opinion of Jimmy Dolan's wiles. Now we're warned; we have men enough to watch all the doors. May I have a word with you?"

He had risen and lifted the flap of the counter that blocked the way to the inner office. The smile lingered on Dolan's face, but it had lost its teasing twist.

"I was just going out—an important engagement," he explained.

"Any client of Jimmy Dolan's will wait. There's no substitute in this city—for your sort of client." Muldrew walked steadily on toward the inner office.

Dolan automatically retreated before him and, when they were inside, closed the door. He had ceased even to smile. Muldrew's confident, almost imperative manner irritated him; but what irritated more was his unconscious submission to it.

Muldrew glanced quickly about the room. The stenographer had told him Dolan was engaged, and the room was full of fresh smoke, yet it now was unoccupied. And no one had left by the front office. A door at the other side of the office explained. But what Muldrew would like to have had explained was why such a secretive exit was necessary. He decided to find that out.

Dolan dropped into a swivel-chair behind the desk and tipped his fingers together. His *sang-froid* had returned. Muldrew took in at a glance the arrangement of desk and chairs. He had sat in the same chair,

facing the window, often before, but the untidiness of the room, particularly of the lawyer's desk, had never before struck him as to-day—though normally Dolan's motto, "Do as I say, not as I do," extended to his outer office as well as to his clients. Papers now heaped his desk, and the floor about the waste-paper basket was littered with torn letters and circulars.

That heavy cloud of cigar smoke interested Muldrew, and he tested it again and again with sensitive nostrils. His eyes dropped to the ash-tray on the edge of the desk near him, and there they lingered for a moment. One pile of letters in the centre of the blotter interested him; they had been left there by Dolan in his hasty departure. That pile seemed to interest Dolan, too, for he drew it nearer and kept a fat hand on it as he talked.

His voice was low and weary:

"Of course, it's about that unfortunate affair at the Club. You've got that in hand, and I know you well enough to feel certain nothing else will be allowed to butt in. Fire ahead."

"You wonder why I come to you ——" Muldrew began.

"Not at all." Dolan waved an indifferent hand. "You've discovered that the murdered girl once worked for me. What of it?"

"Much. It shortens the preliminaries." Muldrew felt in his pocket. "Got a spare cigar, Jimmy? I've had no lunch, and I want something between my teeth."

Dolan reached into a drawer and passed across the desk a half-empty box of cigars.

"Thanks." The detective noticed the lawyer's eyes scrutinizing him. "Oh, I know I'm no smoker, but there are times when a puff or two —— That's all I'll want."

It was more than he wanted. But the purpose it fulfilled was that it told him the cigars in the box were not of the same brand as the stub in the ash-tray before him.

"I thought," said Dolan, "you knew me well enough to eliminate preliminaries. You and I have no use for them. Yes, Miss Draycott worked in this office—if that looks important. I didn't mention it at the Club because no purpose would be served there. I saw you had identified her—and the Club was not the place either of us would wish to discuss the thing. Miss Draycott was here for—I should think—almost a year. . . . I fired her." He had lit a cigar, and now he stopped to watch a curl of smoke wind upward.

"You knew, of course, that she went also by the name of Luscombe?"

Dolan blew another ring. "Why should I? Our relationship had no need of aliases—a purely business connection . . . on my part, at least. The fact that her role became something less than business—or more—resulted in her being fired. The alias pretty well places her, doesn't it? When I learned of the alias ——"

"Who told you?" Muldrew asked.

Dolan's eyes dropped inquiringly to the detective's face. "Doctor Blaney was disposed to talk about the girl to anyone who would listen. Even a famous surgeon can size up the value of publicity. . . . And the value to Blaney was less than nothing. It's put the wind up him that the girl asked for him when she called at the Club. I can't say I blame him."

Muldrew heard through varying sensations. His attention was fixed more on the ash-tray before him, where he abstractedly held the cigar he had lit but, after three or four puffs, ceased to smoke. Under the ashes and the cigar stub lay the end of a cigarette, and

his fingers carelessly flicked it into the open. He became conscious that Dolan was watching.

"The fact that she once worked for you, Jimmy," Muldrew said, "seemed to offer some chance of learning the girl's history."

Jimmy Dolan waved his hand before his face. "I'm afraid I can't help. I knew her only as a clerk —an indifferent clerk at the best. You'll have to chase far beyond any information you can get in this office if you hope to discover the cause of her murder, let alone her murderer. Speaking from years of experience of criminals, I should say the man who murdered Jenny Draycott used remarkable acumen in choosing time and place for the crime. There's a room seldom entered, even by the Club servants; it's in a men's club where any man on the premises is open to suspicion—especially when the victim is such a pretty girl—and the crime occurs at a time when a couple of score of those men are on the spot. . . . I don't wonder you're all at sea about the affair and come to me for help."

Muldrew ignored the hint of inquiry in the last sentence. "One never knows in this game where a clue may be picked up."

"Then you need a clue—you didn't find any?" Dolan asked, trying to conceal his eagerness. "That's what I ——"

"Jimmy, Jimmy!"

Dolan laughed. "Well, one never knows—I might be called for the defence, and I like to carry on the easiest way I can. If I knew all the clues ——" He shrugged. "We've talked it over at the Club, and we can't see where you have a lead. You must be all at sea, as I said."

"With sail and rudder intact, Jimmy—moving on—searching." He winked. "For instance, did anyone

tell you I found the girl's purse—and went through it?"

"No—none of us knew there *was* one." Dolan was not smoking now.

"There was . . . and it was not unrevealing. The murderer of Jenny Draycott, alias Luscombe, left a muddy but not indiscernible trail, and with what I hoped to get from you ——"

"You'll get all I have, Muldrew. Here it is: I fired the girl because ——"

Muldrew interrupted, a favourite trick of his when a witness was set for a story:

"How did you come to employ her? Who recommended her?"

Dolan looked quickly away, and his eyes screwed up. "I suppose she recommended herself. After facing the comeliness of my outer office for years, selected, you may have guessed, with open eyes, I suppose Miss Draycott's face appealed to me. I realized within three months that I had been too susceptible. But I kept her on, hoping. She was no typist, and her stenography was of the sort that requires imagination and daring to interpret. She had both. But what spelled the end was the discovery that she talked out of school. You can imagine how dangerous that was for Jimmy Dolan." He chuckled. "I fired her, that's all."

"I should think firing her was equally dangerous," Muldrew suggested.

Dolan shifted his head until he was staring into the detective's face.

"Are you leading anywhere, Muldrew?"

"Only to the completion of your story, Jimmy."

One of the fat hands tapped for a moment on the blotter. "Well, there *is* more to it. Jenny Draycott didn't take it lying down. She threatened me. But

she had never handled my more confidential work, so when her visits to this office after her dismissal came round to threats I guess I lost my temper. Probably I wasn't a perfect gentleman to her."

"Did she cease her visits then?"

"When I get real mad," Dolan replied, "a woman isn't happy in the vicinity."

"Then she hasn't been here for some time—you haven't seen her?"

Dolan took time to strike an ash from his cigar. "I'd never have seen her at any time after her dismissal, if I'd had my way. . . . Even to Jenny Draycott's rather dull mind it must have percolated that further calls were useless. . . . I'm glad to tell you everything, Muldrew, not only as a member of the Wanderers' Club that indirectly comes under some odium through the crime, but also as a friend who is as yet not legally interested in the criminal. Does any of this add to what you found in her purse?"

"Everything helps."

"Was there evidence that the murderer neglected the purse? I mean, did you find anything the murderer would have preferred hidden—letters, for instance?" Dolan tried to appear casual.

"Hm—m! . . . Yes . . . letters—letters would be useful." Muldrew looked mysterious.

"Letters to her—or to someone else?" Involuntarily Dolan's eyes dropped to the pile on which a hand still lingered from time to time.

"We're fitting the pieces together, Jimmy. Perhaps a picture will emerge. . . . If you'd discussed it with Jacoby instead of with Doctor Blaney, he might have told you something of interest."

"Jacoby? You mean Jacoby, the man at the Club desk?"

"Yes. Jacoby was more closely linked with the crime than the others."

Dolan's self-control vanished. "You don't mean you suspect Jacoby?" he asked excitedly.

"I didn't even hint it. I mean, Jacoby was the man on the spot before and after the murder."

"Yes—yes. I saw you talking to him. I might have known. . . . I remember he shoved his head into the reading-room after the murder and, after a glance, ran away. I even recall hearing him running up the stairs, two or three steps at a time. . . . Perhaps that's useful to you."

Muldrew nodded thoughtfully. "It is—because I can't imagine Jacoby in a panic."

"Nor I. . . . He called the police, too, I understand."

"He also called up *The Star*," Muldrew added.

Dolan bounced in his chair. "You don't mean—he called up a newspaper—the Club clerk! So that's what brought Tiger Lillie on the run."

"Everyone seems upset about it," Muldrew said, "even the police. . . . I thought perhaps you'd be more charitable."

Their eyes met across the desk. Dolan flung his hands wide.

"I see. You think because I was one to recommend him that I'd condone anything he did—a fool-thing like that. You're mistaken. . . . Fact is, I didn't recommend him—not exactly recommend him. The Club was in need of a more intelligent man in the lobby, one they might rely on. You see, the inside life at the Wanderers' Club is peculiar—the best-known men in the city gathered there in a care-free fraternity. Naturally they make asses of themselves at times—schoolboys out for play. Within those walls we're silly kids. But it wouldn't do to let the world

know. . . . I thought Jacoby would fit in there perfectly."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

Dolan shook his head. "Just a client . . . and only two little jobs for him at that. Our relationship was nothing to make me responsible for him."

Across Muldrew's mind flashed a picture of two cars in a blind street at night on the outskirts of the city.

"Jimmy," he said, leaning both hands on the desk and staring straight into Dolan's eyes, "what were you doing out there beside the railroad tracks in the west end last night at nine o'clock?"

For a moment or two Dolan seemed to stop breathing, and his face went white. Then a wave of anger swept it away.

"What do you mean? What the devil does it matter to you—where I was—at any time? Is this inquisition?"

"Just a simple question—and the answer interests me so much more when you seem reluctant to give it."

Jimmy Dolan clambered clumsily to his feet and strode to the window. Quick as a flash Muldrew leaned over the desk and lifted two letters from the top of the pile that lay there. They disappeared into a capacious pocket.

"Do you resent the question?" he asked.

"I certainly do. We were talking about the murder at the Club. What the hell does it matter where I was last night or what I was doing? It's no fanciful inference that you associate the two events. . . . Sometimes the nosiness of the police makes me see red."

He had returned to the desk, but the fever of his anger sent him wandering again. When his back was turned Muldrew extracted from the ash-tray the cigar and cigarette butts that lay there, and dropped them in a pocket.

Dolan was working up to a fine fury.

"Have you the impudence—have even the ordinary police the impudence—to connect what I may have been doing—I don't admit I was doing anything—last night with this murder? Do you dare come right here into my office and try that?" He waved a finger under Muldrew's nose. "You can't work any of your dirty third degree tricks on me, Muldrew. And if I have any more of it there'll be the devil to pay. Get that into your empty pate."

Muldrew shrugged his broad shoulders. "Surely it's hardly worth all that, Jimmy. I asked a simple question. Do you refuse to answer?"

"Go to hell!" Dolan snorted. "I won't answer that question or any other you ask now. I'm going out. You too."

But as they reached the door his anger evaporated. He tapped Muldrew on the shoulder.

"No wonder you fellows fail so often. My dear man, you're a bit of an ass to try that sort of stuff on *me*. The police need training in diplomacy. If you'd really wanted to know where I was last night, and what I was doing, that was the last way to set about it. . . . And if you knew it all you'd kick yourself for wasting time. Take my advice and sleep over this bit of free advice from a man who knows—and usually charges well for what he knows a damn sight less well. Often it's my business to fight the police, but this murder isn't one of the times; or it wouldn't be if you hadn't been so clumsy. I guess we're both sorry, eh? All right, we're still friends. Good-bye."

Muldrew smiled apologetically and passed into the outer office. To the ugly stenographer he threw a broader smile, and was rewarded by answer in kind. Such a face received too few smiles not to glow under one.

The detective did not take the elevator down. Instead, he went quickly along the corridor and turned into the branching hall at one end. There, hidden from the door of Dolan's office, he drew the two stolen letters from his pocket. As he read he whistled softly. Next he examined the cigar butt. It told him no more than he knew before—it was not one of Dolan's cigars. A story lay in it, if he could find the cue. The cigarette end was more exciting. Near the tip a circle of brilliant scarlet ran round it.

From the main corridor came the sound of an opening door and hurried steps. Muldrew, peering round the corner, saw Dolan pressing the elevator-bell, fumingly impatient.

An elevator came down and the lawyer stepped in. Muldrew returned to the door of Dolan's office and entered.

"Has Mr. Dolan gone out yet?" he asked sweetly.

The stenographer was equally sweet. "You must have passed him on the way up. I'm so sorry."

Muldrew looked annoyed. "Isn't that hard luck? Something I forgot to ask—we had so much to talk about. I wonder if Miss Draycott gave him the message I sent, when she was here this morning. Did he happen to mention ——"

"Mr. Dolan doesn't discuss private business like that with us—and we don't discuss him outside. It was for that Jenny Draycott was dismissed, I believe. None of us out here said a word to her when she was here this morning." The girl laughed nastily. "Perhaps she wanted to save her powder for Mr. Dolan. We heard some of it exploding from out here. They *did* have a row. Say, she's got a temper, that girl . . . and that don't give her any start on Mr. Dolan."

Muldrew sighed. "That's Jenny—so foolish, so headstrong. It's so hopeless to try to help her. Please don't mention a word of this to Mr. Dolan. Thanks awfully."

He left the office, and in the privacy of the corridor he beamed triumphantly.

CHAPTER XIII

JUSTIFIED PRECAUTIONS

As Muldrew dropped to the level of the street the picture of Dolan standing fuming beside the elevator returned to him, a more upset and angry Dolan than he had ever seen. The picture clung, so that when he stepped out in the marble-lined hallway on the street level he glanced about. A burly man in a stiff hat standing beside the news stand fingering a pile of magazines interested him. A man, Muldrew decided, who would find little in magazines to hold his attention.

Instead of going on to the street the Detective turned back along the corridor and entered a small office. A man hidden behind an afternoon paper dropped his feet from a desk and stared.

"Why—hello, Muldrew! You on the run yourself this time? What for?"

Muldrew pointed to the paper. "Is that *The Star?*"

"No, *The Gazette.* I always buy the earlier edition of *The Star* to read at home. I sort of like this 'Kolum' in *The Gazette.* Chap I know writes it—Louis Bracken."

Muldrew nodded. "Yes, I know the lad. Let's have a look." He glanced over the front page and for a moment looked worried. "Looks like a scoop for Tiger Lillie," he muttered. "Say, Fergy, let me have your desk for a minute—and an envelope and a stamp."

He took from his pocket the two letters he had purloined from Dolan's desk, inserted them in the envelope, sealed and stamped it.

"Take this out and drop it in the letter-box, Fergy. I'll stay here and wait."

Fergy took the envelope. The address was uppermost. He blinked.

"What's the idea, Muldrew? Writing to yourself?"

"Don't ask questions. Get along with it. And while you're at it take a look around for a big fellow in a stiff hat. He's wearing a green tie. I left him beside the news stand."

Fergy was back in a minute. "Sure!" he whispered. "He's there yet. Got an eye on you, eh? Want me to take him for a ride?"

"No, Fergy. But do you think you could recognize him again in a line-up—if anything happens to me to-night?"

"You bet I could. But can't I do something? I owe you such a lot, Muldrew."

"Just that—keep him in mind till I telephone you some time to-night that I'm safe. It's a chance; I'm taking only a bit of it. . . . One chance I won't take is letting him know I'm on. You dropped that letter? Thanks."

"I'd do a million times more ——"

"Forget it, Fergy." Muldrew patted him on the shoulder. "That's a forgotten chapter. I knew you'd run straight if you had a chance."

The big man in the Derby hat was not in sight when Muldrew reappeared in the corridor, but as he came out into the street someone on the other side strolled in the same direction. The Detective smiled.

Instead of going home as he had planned, he made for the Wanderers' Club and turned directly into the visitors' room. A strange bell-boy answered the bell.

"Will you ask Mr. Jacoby to come here for a minute, my boy?"

The boy rolled his eyes. "Mr. Jacoby ain't here now."

Muldrew started for the lobby. "Not here? Do you mean he's gone—left the Club?"

"Yes, sir, he's gone."

The Detective stalked into the lobby, his face clouded. Shipman, the Club Secretary, was near the door of his office, and Muldrew strode up to him.

"What's this I hear—Jacoby gone?"

"That's right. I fired him. This is no place for a clerk with no better sense of his position than to call up the newspapers when something happens in the building. You don't think I'd keep him after that?"

Muldrew controlled himself with difficulty. "What I do think wouldn't sound very nice, Shipman. One thing any sane man would think would be that the secretary of a club where a murder has occurred would ——" He sighed. "When did he go?"

"Just as soon as I could send him packing with a month's pay," Shipman replied hotly.

"Do you know where he is?"

"I do not—and I don't wish to."

"No—you wouldn't." Muldrew laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. "There may be much you don't wish crowded into this affair before I'm through with you," he warned.

Shipman's face paled. "Why—why—what do you mean?"

Muldrew drew a long breath. "You profess to be anxious to solve this crime—yet you expect me to do it when you block me at every turn. You make it look as if I'll have to take you in hand to get you out of the way. Shipman, you annoy me."

"I've blocked you nowhere—at any time," Shipman protested, trying in vain to conceal his agitation. "What has Jacoby to do with it?"

"What has Jacoby to do with it?" Muldrew mimicked. "What has anyone who was here in the Club at the time of the murder to do with it? Why should the police make a move without consulting your wishes? How dare we travel a course of our own? . . . Shipman, if you make another move there's nothing for me to do but to arrest you."

He turned on his heels and left the building.

As he strode along, angry at himself for losing his temper, the shouting of a newsboy penetrated his thoughts:

"All about the big hurricane! Two hundred killed! Paper, mister? *Star—'zette?* Last edition. Paper, sir?"

Muldrew stopped and stared at the newsboy.

"Here! Give me a *Star*."

He clutched at it and ran his eye over the front page.

Not a word about the murder! He ran through the inside pages with a foolish thought that somehow such an important event had been misplaced in the make-up. Nothing there!

He walked on, still clutching the paper. His mind was in a whirl. Something had gone astray—something—somebody had missed! . . . But Tiger Lillie seldom missed. Muldrew bought a *Gazette*. The same blank disregard for the day's crime stared at him.

Muldrew entered a store and asked to use the telephone. He was not surprised when *The Star* reported that Tiger was not in. Muldrew knew where to find him. He called a coffee shop, and after a short delay Tiger's impatient voice came over the wire.

"That you, Tiger?"

"Sure as you're there, Gordy. What's up? Any news for *The Star?*"

"I'm asking you, Tiger."

"An awfully drab day, Gordy. The one bright spot

is the coffee here and the doughnuts. You should drop in some time and ——"

"I've just run through *The Star*, Tiger. What's in your mind?"

"Never much of anything—according to you," Tiger chortled.

Muldrew was getting nowhere. "I thought I was to consult the late edition of *The Star* for the latest dope about the murder. You said so—you even threatened it."

"What murder?" Tiger asked sweetly. "Has there been ——"

Muldrew hung up. This new racket of Tiger Lillie's —where did it figure in events? What bearing was it planned to have on the pursuit of the murderer of Jenny Draycott? Tiger was up to something—and it could mean only added trouble for the police. Except at a crisis Tiger thought of nothing but his paper—and the newspapers were more often a nuisance than a help.

Muldrew had wandered blindly along as he mused over this latest worry. It had grown quite dark. Now and then a face loomed up before him—a street light—a lighted store-front. Everything was vague and unimpressive, meaningless against the turmoil in his mind.

He became dimly conscious that a large car had drawn up to the curb ahead of him. As he passed it he swung instinctively toward the inner edge of the sidewalk. The car doors suddenly opened and a stream of men precipitated themselves toward him.

However deep his absorption, Muldrew was never completely unprepared. An extra sense always came to his aid to warn him of danger, usually in time. As the men rushed he ducked, and two of them went flying over his back, to crash into the wall. The next

he picked up and hurled back against the car. But three more grabbed him, and the two who had fallen first were picking themselves up, though one seemed to be out of the fight. A pair of powerful arms wrapped about him, hands clawed at him. Muldrew tore himself free and ran. A policeman blocked him at the first corner.

"All right, Tommy," Muldrew said. "Trot along. I'm all right. Just a spot of evening exercise—working up an appetite."

He wished no publicity just then, no forced explanations, no arrests. The water, stirred, would be too muddy to see through—and there was so much to understand that might be hidden were he to act precipitately.

Suddenly he reached to his pockets. Two of them were inside out!

Muldrew grinned. "You did me a better turn than you knew, Fergy," he muttered.

But the next instant the grin vanished. The knife that had driven to Jenny Draycott's heart was gone too!

CHAPTER XIV

AN AMATEUR OPERATOR

On his way home Muldrew dropped into a restaurant for a long-delayed bite. Seated in a corner alone, he dawdled over the meal. Mrs. Crosby was in the hall when he entered his lodging-house.

"Last mail delivered yet, Mrs. Crosby?"

His landlady regarded him scornfully. "You know it don't come till nine, Mr. Muldrew." In her opinion detectives were the world's prize imbeciles.

"Ah, yes, I forgot. I expect a letter, that's all. Don't leave it in the box, please. Take it upstairs to my room. I'm going out, and I may be late."

"Thanks for telling me," Mrs. Crosby replied through tight lips. "But I never knew you early—the ungodly hours you keep."

"But consider the electric light I save you, Mrs. Crosby."

Mrs. Crosby folded her hands across her stomach, and with her head high sailed back to the kitchen.

Muldrew climbed to his room and called up a number.

"It's all right, Fergy. I'm home, safe and sound. Forget all about it."

He sat down for a few minutes but did not rest; all the time he kept nervously consulting his watch. After an interval he decided he could not wait for the mail, and putting an electric flash-light in his pocket, he examined his gun and left the house.

Muldrew was not happy. So much had happened since the murder, each event with its own special significance, each worth following to an explanation, but all of them too far dissociated to be treated in any other way than singly until the explanation came. And to treat them singly was beyond him in the time he had. In fact, all along he was unconvinced that his investigation had followed the most productive course. But with half a dozen channels demanding immediate attention how could he be satisfied ?

One thing he had neglected. It had troubled him more or less since the discovery of the murdered girl, but other things had seemed more pressing. Now, as he set out for the apartment where Bill Draycott lived with his mother, Muldrew felt certain that this was what he should have done first.

He tried to defend himself. Bill's mother was the last one likely to be in a position to throw light on the alias and hidden life of her niece. And the murder of Jenny Draycott was connected with that alias, not with her life with the Draycotts.

But his self-defence was inadequate. The street car seemed to crawl, the street blocks to stretch and stretch, and, of course, a stranded truck finally blocked the way. The Cullen Apartments were in the West End, and Muldrew hailed a passing taxi.

As the taxi turned at the corner of the street he sought Muldrew leaned forward. At that moment a man hurried past, keeping to the shadowed side of the walk. The Detective reached to the handle of the door, but he did not turn it, contenting himself with watching the man through the rear window.

The taxi pulled up before an extensive but not high building and the glass panel slid back.

" Here you are, sir—the Cullen Apartments. What number did you want ? There's a bunch of 'em—

three wings. This one runs to Number 27." The driver pointed to a sign-board on the corner of the wing.

Muldrew climbed out. "All right." He paid absent-mindedly, his thoughts still on that hurrying figure.

As he opened the front door a head disappeared behind a small counter in the corner of the hall. Muldrew went curiously forward, then he reached over the counter and dragged into view—Tiger Lillie!

"Have you changed your job, Tiger? Or perhaps you're trying to earn something on the side—for charity."

Tiger's face was crimson with confusion. "Hey, there, Gordy, lay off. What's all the savagery about? I didn't know I had to report to the police when I made a move."

"No, and I didn't know you knew how to run a switch-board. A new accomplishment, isn't it?"

"You don't know half my accomplishments, Gordy," Tiger replied with mock dignity. "Did you wish to see someone, sir," he lisped. "I'll put you through—if you give me your name."

Muldrew leaned over the counter, studying the impudent face of the reporter. "Tiger, you worry me. Sometimes I don't know how to handle you. But the sooner you're put out of this affair the better for me. I've enough to stew about without you butting in and mixing the clues."

Tiger looked hurt. "I don't see how you can talk that way. If I choose to help a girl friend out ——"

"We'll discuss that choice of yours later. Now, I want ——"

The telephone rang, a small red light flashed, and Tiger clumsily adjusted his head-piece. A few stammering words, a fumble with plugs, and he was free again.

"These switch-board affairs are a maze. They take brains, Gordy. I like to think I have 'em—I was testing it. Besides, knowing a little of everything comes in useful at times."

"And," said Muldrew, "you decided this was a good night and a good place to learn a little that was useful—for what you wanted. . . . Perhaps it was useful for your purpose to omit from the paper all mention of the Draycott murder, one of the most sensational that ever occurred in the city."

"I didn't know you depended so much on *The Star*, Gordy, for your news. I'm sorry if it peeved you. . . . By the way, did you notice that *The Gazette*, too, had nothing about that crime? Perhaps—who knows—*The Morning Times* and *The Telegraph* may be equally silent. You see, Gordy, the newspapers have agreed to print no news about people who don't advertise ——"

Muldrew waved it away. "Turn off the tap, Tiger. I haven't time. Now, what's the explanation of this newspaper silence, this pulling of wires?"

"There can be only one reason." Tiger was serious now. "We wish to solve the murder of Jenny Draycott. And," he added with a wink, "to prove once more to the police that even a reporter has brains."

Muldrew frowned thoughtfully. "Your brains are unimportant . . . and some of the ideas that come to them in newspaper life are—dangerous—if they're worse than foolish. As for solving that crime, Tiger, you are, as usual, an infernal nuisance."

"Don't say that, Gordy." Tiger's face screwed up in mock pain. "In the last half hour I've learned more about the Draycotts than you'd have uncovered in a month. . . . And I'm going to spill it 'raight n—now,' as my favourite movie star parrots so often."

Muldrew's eyes gleamed. "I'll give you credit for

an idea there, Tiger. . . . But you were more fortunate than you expected—the luck of the novice. Did Mr. Lansing stop to talk?"

Tiger jumped. "How did you know he was here?"

"Nothing clever about that. I saw him on the street. Was he here to see the Draycotts?"

"How do I know? . . . Say, I never thought of that. Lansing came in and scooted up the stairs. I hadn't time to see his face—and he must have left the same way. I wasn't quite sure it was he ——"

"How long was he upstairs?"

"Only a few minutes. Not long enough to —— But say, Gordy, surely you don't connect Lansing with the crime—Lansing, an ex-Mayor, President of the Chamber of Commerce, Director of the Power Company, high cock-a-lorum in a dozen societies, and financial mogul in the city! Besides, he can't have been at the Draycotts', because they're not at home."

"Are you sure of that?" Muldrew inquired anxiously.

"Sure as can be. There've been two calls come through, and no one in the apartment to answer when I connect. Now, there's Sherlock Holmesing for you. How do I know? Easy as that." Tiger made a slight movement with one hand. "Two and two make four —a system y'oughta try, Gordy. I've been ——"

The telephone bell rang, a red spot appeared on the board. Tiger reached for a plug, then his eyes bulged. He pointed.

"Look—look, Gordy! It's Number 22 calling—the Draycott number! What—what should I do—because it must be—a ghost—there's no one there?"

Muldrew struck him sharply on the arm. "Get in on it! Quick, Tiger! Talk to them. See what's wanted—and who's speaking."

Tiger, his voice trembling, spoke into the receiver

before his lips. "Hello! . . . Hello! . . . Switch-board, switch-board! Hello!" He looked up helplessly at Muldrew. "They don't answer!" he whispered. "And the light's still on!"

"Where's Number 22?" Muldrew snapped.

"It'll be on the third floor. Nine to a floor. Wait—wait!" as Muldrew dashed for the stairs.

Tiger ripped the head-piece off, ducked beneath the counterflap, and raced up the stairs after Muldrew. Behind him the bell continued to ring.

CHAPTER XV

AN OMINOUS ATTACK

MULDREW pressed the button. From beyond the closed door of the Draycott apartment came the jangle of the electric bell. He rang again. Then he bent his ear to the keyhole.

"Get back to the switch-board, Tiger," he ordered. "I don't want it deserted for a moment. Call the janitor and send him here with his keys on the run. Quick!"

Tiger lingered. "Aw, now, Gordy! I'll miss everything."

Muldrew caught him by the waist and sent him headlong. "You'll miss more if you don't run for it," he promised savagely.

Tiger gathered himself up, and with a hurt look rushed away. "Here's where the police," he grumbled, "expect everyone else to do his duty."

Muldrew rang no more; he had no wish to rouse the neighbours. Returning to the head of the stairs, he could hear the telephone ringing. In a moment it stopped. Tiger had made quick time.

It seemed only a second or two before the janitor, a cadaverous little man with a Cockney accent, ran breathlessly up. Muldrew pointed to the door.

"I must get in there—in a hurry." He showed his badge.

The janitor's hands trembled as he fumbled at a large bunch of keys and at last found the one he sought.

The door opened. As he darted ahead, curiosity overcoming his fright, Muldrew caught him by the shoulder and drew him back.

"Stay out here till I want you."

He sidled through the door and closed it quickly behind him. The room was dark, but his groping hand found the switch.

A woman of about forty-five lay stretched on the floor, apparently unconscious. She was bound and gagged, and the upset telephone at her side explained the signal that had reached the switch-board.

As Muldrew dropped to his knees beside her a low groan broke through the gag. In a moment she was free and propped against the table. Her eyes opened. At first they were vague and unfocused, but suddenly they focused on Muldrew, and the woman shrank back with a scream. Muldrew still held her arm to steady her.

"It's all right, Mrs. Draycott, it's all right. It's the police."

But the woman was hysterical.

The door pushed open and the janitor ran in, his fists doubled.

"Come nearer and let her see you," Muldrew ordered. "Tell her who I am. We've got to quiet this noise."

The janitor saw the severed ropes. With infinite tenderness he knelt beside the excited woman and took her hands.

"You're all right, Mrs. Draycott. You know me. This man is a policeman. See, 'e cut the ropes. 'E found you."

Mrs. Draycott grasped the two soiled hands and clung to them, and her hysteria calmed. Between them the two men lifted her to her feet and sat her in a chair.

"Where's Bill?" she demanded suddenly, glaring wildly about the room. "Where's my boy?"

Muldrew pounced on it. "Was he here when they did this to you?"

"Yes, yes, he was here—just before—when they came—when the first man came and asked for him. They went out in the hall together. Then—then the other man came in and—I don't remember much more. But they didn't hurt me," she wailed. "It was Bill they wanted. Where is he? Please, please, find my boy."

"We'll find him, Mrs. Draycott," Muldrew promised. "Now tell us what happened."

Muldrew's seriousness impressed her. Her hand to her head, she told the story. Bill, she said, must have known the man who came and asked for him, for he greeted him familiarly.

"Did he call him by name?" Muldrew asked.

Mrs. Draycott thought for a moment. "No. I remember now—the man winked; then they went out together."

"How long ago did this happen?"

The woman examined the cheap clock on the table, where it stood beside the telephone the janitor had replaced. "It must have been more than an hour ago. We had just finished supper. . . . I must have fainted while they were tying me up, because I don't remember much about it—just fighting them. When I came to I was lying on my bed in the room in there, in the dark. I managed to get my feet to the floor and hop to the telephone. I knew if I could knock it off, the girl at the switchboard would know something was wrong. I must have fainted again then."

"It was the telephone did tell us," Muldrew said. "Now, did you recognize any of the men—had you ever seen them before?"

Mrs. Draycott shook her head. "There were only two. I've never seen them before—I'm quite sure. But where's Bill? Oh, do find him! It's all part of that dreadful affair at the Club; I know it is. Poor Jenny! What could anyone have against Jenny?"

Muldrew was silent for a few moments, giving Mrs. Draycott time to recover herself.

"Describe the man who asked for your son."

"It was all so quick—and I was in the kitchen. I just came in here as the man winked and they went out in the hall together. But I do remember—such a fierce look and—and about medium height. Nothing peculiar I can remember but that look."

"How old was he?"

"I could only guess. Perhaps forty or so."

"Had he a moustache?"

Mrs. Draycott shook her head pitifully and tears ran down her cheeks. "I can't remember—any more," she sobbed.

Muldrew knew better than to press her. Description of a sudden assailant was often more misleading than helpful unless he could produce the man.

"Would you recognize him?"

Mrs. Draycott's eyes flashed. "Indeed I would. . . . Oh, where's my boy—where's my Bill. Won't you please find him first? I'm all right now."

The door opened and Tiger Lillie crept in.

"It's all right, Gordy," he said, anticipating Muldrew's peremptory dismissal. "The switch-board girl's back."

"And what I want to know," clamoured the janitor, "is why she wasn't at 'er job hall the time. What right 'ad you to ——"

Muldrew drew him aside. "It's all right. I arranged it. If it hadn't been for this young man we wouldn't be here now. And don't say a word to the girl. I

don't want her upset; I've some questions to ask her."

"Where is your niece's room?" he asked of Mrs. Draycott.

"She slept with me. There's only one bedroom. Bill slept over there on the couch."

Muldrew stepped through the door to which she pointed and switched on the light.

"Can you come here, Mrs. Draycott?" he asked, a tinge of excitement in his voice.

Mrs. Draycott hurried to him.

"Lands' sakes!" she exclaimed. "Burglars, that's what they were."

The room was in disorder. Every drawer had been pulled out and spilled on the floor, the door of the clothes closet was open, revealing a similar disarray there. Even the dresser covers had been taken off.

Mrs. Draycott sank weakly into a chair. "I—I didn't see this when—when I got up to go to the telephone."

Muldrew reminded her that the room was dark. Mrs. Draycott pointed to a dresser where a locked drawer had evidently been torn out, for the wood was splintered at the lock.

"That was Jenny's own drawer. It's the only locked one in the room; she wanted one that would lock. I never knew why. And only stuff like that in it!" indicating the scattered contents.

"Perhaps there was more in it an hour ago, Mrs. Draycott," Muldrew said.

The woman peered into his eyes. "Was there—was there—anything wrong—with Jenny? I used to wonder sometimes. She was so headstrong—and so pretty, far too pretty for the city. She was brought up in the country, you know. I told Dick—that's my brother-in-law and her father—I told him not to let

her come to the city, but they thought she was so wonderful."

Varying emotions teemed through Muldrew's head. He had come too late. Someone who had been wiser than he, someone who knew or suspected or feared what might be found among Jenny Draycott's things, had got ahead of him. He knew now why he had felt uneasy all day. He remembered the burly fellow in the stiff hat near the elevator in the Cosgrave Building —the street attack—the search of the girl's other apartment in time to anticipate the police—the ring of red around the end of that cigarette stub. That—the sum of it all, at any rate—should have warned him. But something else would have had to wait, something that threatened more seriously from delay than the apartment where the murdered girl had lived with an aunt and cousin who could know nothing of her double life.

Everything was a jumble—pieces that had yet to be fitted together. One thing the attack on Mrs. Draycott told him—more than one man was concerned in the affair. The attack on himself may have been by a hired gang. But the pair that had come to the Draycott apartment were personally concerned. Their connection with Jenny Draycott must be his first care. And for the present he must think of them only as her associates, not her murderers, the explanation of her alias rather than of her murder.

Were they her murderers they would not have left dangerous clues among the dead girl's effects, trusting to anticipate the police at every turn. And for a murder like that the visitors' room at the Wanderers' Club would surely not have been chosen.

Lansing? Muldrew turned his thoughts sharply away.

Mrs. Draycott had risen and was wandering wildly

about the room. "It's all to do with poor Jenny," she moaned. "They killed her, these men did! And now they have my boy!"

Muldrew continued to examine the pieces of the puzzle. The raid on the murdered girl's two addresses proved that the raiders knew of her death; they must have known in a few minutes. And that could mean only one thing—someone in the Wanderers' Club had passed the word along, someone who passed it without delay.

He asked: "Did you know your niece's friends, Mrs. Draycott?"

"Not many—lately. I knew more of them before she came to live with us. Since she lost her job she's been a different girl—moody, sullen, and so defiant and hard to handle. . . . I haven't known of a girl friend for months."

"But there were male friends?"

Mrs. Draycott shook her head sadly. "A pretty girl like Jenny—she was bound to have admirers—boy friends. I never met them, never saw them, but they used to telephone. They never came here. I don't think Jenny wished me to know them. She was always so secretive, but much more so of late. She resented every question, every show of curiosity. I suppose," sighing, "I was much the same at her age."

Muldrew felt he was getting nowhere. The futile meanderings of those who could give information always irritated him. Either they could tell nothing, or they could tell so much that they deliberately concealed it. Mrs. Draycott, he perceived, was utterly frank. Muldrew returned to the janitor in the living-room.

"Are you married?"

The janitor looked alarmed. "Of course. My wife ain't the kind ——"

"Bring her up here and leave her with Mrs. Draycott till she can get a friend to stop with her."

The janitor departed on his errand. Muldrew looked about for Tiger Lillie. He heard a switch click through the door that led to the kitchen. Next instant Tiger came rushing in to him. His face was white as chalk.

"Gordy, Gordy," he whispered, "for God's sake come out here—here in the kitchen!"

CHAPTER XVI

MURDER

WITH a signal for silence Muldrew turned back to the bedroom. Mrs. Draycott still wandered vaguely about.

"You'd better lie down," he said. "What you need now is rest. Don't try to handle this mess till you're better fitted for it. I'll close the door. The janitor's wife will be here in a moment."

The woman turned red eyes on him. "Oh, do find my boy—find Bill!" She dropped on the bed and lay limply back.

Muldrew went out and closed the door. In the kitchen he found Tiger kneeling beside the twisted body of Bill Draycott. In his hand Tiger still held the cord he had cut from the boy's neck.

The detective snatched at it, but after a glance he shook his head disappointedly. The boy was dead, had been dead for some time. Muldrew seated himself on the kitchen table and stared at the wall with troubled eyes. Presently a light came into those eyes.

"The same idea," he muttered, "and that means something. It proves the same background for the two crimes, if not the same murderer. . . . The murder of Jenny Draycott made this one necessary . . . and I think—I know—why."

He examined the dead boy more carefully. The face was black and contorted. No knife had been necessary there to hasten the job.

A low moan burst from Muldrew's lips, and his eyes were wet. "If only I had come here first!"

Tiger came to his defence. "You can't be everywhere at once, Gordy. No one would have thought of this."

"I should have thought of it. . . . Bill was helping me to find the murderer of his cousin. I should have been more careful——"

The sound of an opening door sent him hurrying to the living-room. A large woman with ragged grey hair and a brisk manner had entered from the hall.

"Are you the janitor's wife?" Muldrew asked. "Go in there to Mrs. Draycott, please, and keep her there at any cost till I get the word to you. I'll cough when the way is clear."

The eyes of the woman were fixed on the open kitchen door. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Never mind. Do what I say."

The woman passed through to the bedroom, her eyes never leaving the kitchen door until she was out of sight. Muldrew returned and picked the little body up. Out in the hall the janitor lay in wait. At sight of the dead boy he cried out.

"Quick!" Muldrew whispered. "Is there a back stairs? I must get down to your apartment."

Speechless, but not paralysed, the janitor trotted along the hall to a narrow stairway at the rear of the building. . . . Muldrew laid the small form on a couch and telephoned Inspector Armitage. Tiger Lillie had trailed silently behind.

"Stay here, Tiger," Muldrew ordered, "till the police come."

He returned to the front hall. The girl at the switch-board was too busy powdering her nose even to look up. Muldrew, his nerves on edge, snatched the compact from her hand.

"I've something more important than that for you

to do," he snapped. "I'm Detective Muldrew. I want to talk to you."

The girl's face had no need of powder then, but in a moment her practised *sang-froid* came to her aid.

"The idea!" she drawled, fluffing her hair with one limp hand. "I like your nerve."

Muldrew leaned over the little counter. "Get this, miss, I don't care a damn what you like or don't like. We're talking, and we're wasting no time in repartee —or I'll take you where you'll be glad to talk and get it over. You were on this board until Tiger Lillie relieved you an hour or so ago, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir—of course. I didn't want to give it up, but he begged so hard. He said it was to help the police—and he was so nice—and I wanted ——" She seemed about to weep.

"All right, don't explain. It was the best thing you ever did. It *was* to help the police. What I want to know is who came into this hall just before you left —between half-past six and seven, say—and went up to Mrs. Draycott's apartment."

"I—I don't remember that anyone did. Let's see." She screwed up her face in an effort that made her plucked eye-brows look like haphazard slashes of ink. "I'm quite sure no one asked for 22—no visitors, I mean. I think I'd remember, though that's the busiest hour of the day—everyone coming home or going out. I don't pay any attention if I'm not asked questions. I have the switch-board to watch."

Muldrew sighed. The uniformity with which every source of information disappointed him was one of the annoyances of his profession, but never so much as in this case. He had hoped for something from this girl. The murderer of poor little Bill Draycott had passed before her eyes—there was no other entrance—and she remembered nothing!

"You knew Miss Draycott?" he asked.

"You mean Jenny? Sure I know her." And, her manner said, I dislike her as much as any girl dislikes a more beautiful member of her sex.

"How much do you know about her?"

"All I want —— I mean, nothing much. I'm not interested. That's what I mean when I say 'all I want.' She's no friend of mine."

"Now listen: I want complete and frank answers, because Jenny Draycott was murdered this morning."

The girl's lips fell apart. "Jenny—murdered?"

"Yes, and you may be able to help us find the murderer. You're on the switch-board most of the day, aren't you?"

"I'm on eight hours a day ——"

"And no telephone message can reach the Draycott apartment except through this board?"

"That's right."

"Did many calls come through for Miss Draycott?"

"Ye—es, quite a few. And always from men."

"That's what I wished to know. Did you ever get a name?"

The girl shook her head. "That was the funny part of it. They always ——" She stopped and looked confused. "I used to listen in sometimes. It seemed so funny they wouldn't give their names ——"

"Never mind explaining. You listened in; I hoped you did."

"Well, they never gave names, just nick-names—and sometimes it was a number—and not always a telephone number, either. Don't you think that's strange? Sometimes a man telephoned her to meet him, and mostly it was at some place that was nothing more than a number—like four—or six. Then they'd give the hour. Jenny would always go out some time before."

"Did she ever make such an appointment herself?"

"Not that I ever heard. In fact, she was a bit nasty with the men, I thought. Once she got real mad, then the man at the other end said something that cooled her off; it seemed to frighten her."

Muldrew asked what he said.

"He said: 'Don't be a damned fool, my girl! You're doing what I say.'"

Muldrew had struck a mine of information that meant more to him than it would to anyone else.

"Did any of these men come to see her?"

"Very few. They never went upstairs—just had me telephone for her to come down, and then they went outside and waited for her. I don't remember more than once, anyway."

"Could you recognize the man again?"

"I don't think so. I had little chance ——"

Muldrew returned to the Draycott apartment, after telephoning the janitor where he might be found. Three plain-clothes-men had come and been directed to the janitor's apartment. He had asked for plain-clothes-men to prevent curiosity about the place.

The janitor's wife answered when he knocked on the bedroom door.

"You didn't cough," she complained, "and I've had an awful time keeping her in there. She wanted to telephone a friend. And is it true that that pretty Miss Draycott has been murdered?"

"Only too true."

"And what was it—out there in the kitchen?" she asked in a whisper. "Was it the boy?"

Muldrew did not answer. "Mrs. Draycott may telephone now. Or wait a moment; I'll speak to her first."

Mrs. Draycott was sitting up in bed with a dresser drawer on her knees and disordered garments all

about her. There was a wild look in the eyes she turned on Muldrew.

"Have you found him—my boy?" she demanded. "I thought you'd gone to find him. But I know," hysterically, "I know: he's dead—dead!"

"Now, Mrs. Draycott," Muldrew reproved. "What's the use of working yourself up that way? We'll find your son. You say he went out with the man who asked for him. Did he seem frightened?"

"No, indeed. He seemed rather glad, sort of hopeful. I thought, maybe, it was another job."

"Was he dissatisfied with his job at the Wanderers' Club?"

"He lost it. Lost it this afternoon. . . . He was dismissed."

It struck Muldrew through such a mist of surprising developments that he scarcely believed his ears.

"Dismissed? Bill dismissed — this afternoon? Who dismissed him—the Club Secretary?"

"No, sir, it was Mr. Jacoby, the clerk; he had control of the bell-boys."

"I — see . . . Did Bill say why he was dismissed?"

"He didn't rightly know. Mr. Jacoby said he'd have to go. Things were all upset at the Club by the murder—and Bill had to pay for it. As if poor Jenny's murder wasn't enough! But everything at the Club was always so awful secret. First thing Mr. Jacoby said when he took Bill on was that he wasn't to mention the Club or anything about it outside the walls. If he had anything to say he could say it to Mr. Jacoby himself. Bill never did speak of the Club, even to me. So it couldn't have been for that he was dismissed."

"Mr. Jacoby gave Bill no reason, no inkling, why he had to go?"

Mrs. Draycott shook her head gloomily. "I'm sure it's all because of Jenny. It's all such a horrible mystery."

"I'm afraid you're right, Mrs. Draycott. But we'll get to the bottom of it. . . . You may be interested to know that Jacoby himself was dismissed this afternoon."

The woman's eyes opened. "Why—why, Bill says he was like a Club member himself—the Club couldn't get along without him."

Muldrew turned to go. "Bill was wrong. Any member of that Club seems to be able to fire any employee with a word—and almost to engage one. Someone wanted Jacoby fired—someone who fancied he had a reason. I'll attend to Bill's case, Mrs. Draycott."

CHAPTER XVII

DOUBLE LARCENY

Down in the janitor's quarters Muldrew found Inspector Armitage in charge. The Inspector lifted his eyebrows sternly.

"Yes," Muldrew admitted dejectedly, "I know I was too late, sir. They moved too fast for me—they've moved too fast all around. I'm only one man—I can't anticipate everything."

"You think, as I do, that it's all part of the affair at the Club?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. Bill died in the course of duty. I had asked him to pick up a few loose ends for me; he seemed to be in the best position to do it. Someone must have known of it. I'm more convinced than ever that Bill had something of value for me, if only either of us had realized it. But his murderer got ahead of us."

Inspector Armitage looked down on the sad little form on the couch, and his moustache seemed to bristle.

"By God, Muldrew, we'll get the fiend that did this if we have to put the whole force on it. If you need help ——"

"I do—if it's this crime you're most concerned about. I'd like you to put someone else on it."

"But, Muldrew ——" the Inspector began.

"Yes, I know, sir. But I'm busy on the Jenny Draycott murder."

"But you just said it's the same affair."

"The same affair, sir—I mean, the same background, but not necessarily the same murderer. I want to concentrate. I'm afraid if I took up the trail of this scoundrel I might be led away from my first task. . . . Later the trails are certain to cross."

The Inspector looked worried and not a little irritated. He pointed to the red line about the boy's neck.

"I can't for the life of me see how you can separate the two crimes. Here's the girl's cousin—murdered on the same day, by the same means ——"

"But not by the same cord, Inspector." Muldrew drew the two cords from his pocket and held them for the Inspector to see. "The same idea, that's all, this crime prompted by the first, the method in this one suggested by that used to pave the way for the wound that ended Jenny Draycott's life. . . . Two reasons for this murder suggest themselves to me: Either it was committed to close Bill's lips, or he had to be got out of the way to enable someone to go through Jenny Draycott's effects in this apartment. I'm not yet prepared to say which. . . . The significant feature of it is that Bill knew his murderer. Which means that, unknown to the boy, he was acquainted with the man who had reason to destroy any clues that might be found among the murdered girl's effects.

"If only Bill were alive, how simple it would be! That's what his murderer knew. What we have to discover now is who knew both Bill and his cousin. Bill probably, I gathered from his talk with me, was not aware of a mutual friend. But I must go carefully there," he ended miserably. "It may be only a hunch. I'm going home to sleep on it."

But Muldrew was not to sleep for many hours yet —and when the time came to sleep it would evade

him for hours because of what had happened in the meantime.

He passed into the fresh night air, filling his lungs again and again to bursting. He could never rid himself of the thought that about a dead body, victim of foul play, hung a distinct odour. And death meant little else than foul play to Muldrew.

Feeling oppressed, he decided to walk home. He always thought more clearly on his feet in the open air, better still in some unfrequented or unfamiliar section of the city. Surroundings unencumbered by associations left him free to think. At such times deductions formed, plans developed, convictions crystallized; and the results had usually justified his selection, involuntary as it was.

Drawing deep breaths, he strode briskly along, heading toward home. Near the second corner a pedestrian stepped quickly aside to let him pass, and Muldrew's attention focused.

"Ah, Jacoby!" Muldrew pulled up.

Jacoby smiled wanly. "I didn't expect to meet you in *my* part of the city, Mr. Muldrew," he said. "Or do you live out here?"

"I live four miles or so from here, Jacoby. Where do you live?"

"Only three blocks away. That is, I sleep there. I'm a bachelor, you know."

Muldrew turned and fell in at his side. "We can talk as we walk. I'm in no hurry, and I wanted a few words with you. We might as well have them now."

"It suits me," Jacoby replied. "Come around to my place. I've an extra chair or two, and a fair cigar . . . and more spare time than I had half a dozen hours ago. Mr. Shipman fired me this afternoon."

"So I was told at the Club. I was more than surprised. I understood you had given unusual

satisfaction ; they were getting the idea they couldn't get along without you."

"That was before I was foolish enough to telephone the newspapers about the murder," Jacoby said, with a wry smile. "The last thing the Wanderers' Club wants is publicity. . . . The last thing it could stand, I might tell you."

Muldrew nodded. "Your dismissal, Jacoby, surprised me no more than your failure to realize the natural desire of any reputable club for privacy. . . . They'll have a time filling your shoes."

"Perhaps—though I didn't find it a difficult post. . . . I see now I made a mistake calling up *The Star*. I can only explain it as the result of the excitement—a murder right there under my nose, you might say."

Muldrew agreed that he could scarcely be blamed. "Naturally you wanted the murder solved as quickly as possible. Publicity seemed the best course. . . . There are times when it is." He stopped and laid a hand on Jacoby's arm. "Come to think of it, hadn't we better go to my rooms? I've had a hard day—and there'll be another to-morrow. If you're idle now ——"

"Suits me." Jacoby turned, but he had taken only a step or two when he pulled up. "Would you mind giving me a few minutes at my rooms? It's only a block from here, and there's something I must do right away."

After walking something more than a block Jacoby turned into a long cement walk that led over a dark lawn to an ancient house. At the edge of the verandah he stopped.

"I'll only be a minute or two." He ran up the four steps, unlocked the door with a latch-key, and disappeared.

The moment the door closed Muldrew climbed the

four steps himself and took his stand close to the entrance. Presently he heard the dim clicking of a telephone dial, then the murmur of Jacoby's voice.

Muldrew leaned against the wall, watching all about him. After a moment of fruitless listening he began to stroll about the verandah. Someone passed on the opposite side of the street. Two minutes later the same man repassed. Muldrew's eyes narrowed. The third time the man strolled along the side-walk Muldrew chuckled.

When Jacoby returned Muldrew was sauntering up and down the cement walk. A taxi took them in fifteen minutes to Muldrew's lodging-house.

At the sound of the opening door Mrs. Crosby came to meet them.

"You got what you sent for, Mr. Muldrew?" she asked.

For a moment Muldrew regarded her with bewilderment, then, with an "All right, Mrs. Crosby; thanks," he ushered Jacoby into the musty sitting-room and, closing the door, sought his landlady and led her upstairs to his room.

"What did you mean, Mrs. Crosby. What did you think I sent for?"

"The man you sent—he said he found what you wanted," Mrs. Crosby explained. "When you called up and said you were sending him ——"

"I didn't call you up," Muldrew declared savagely. "Go on. What happened?"

Mrs. Crosby blinked. "You didn't—call up?" She dropped limply on the bed. "I coulda sworn it was your voice. Oh, dear! Then it was someone else!"

"It certainly was. Someone, it seems, called you up, imitating my voice, and said I was sending someone

to my room for something. And you were to let him in. That was it, wasn't it?"

"Yes—yes! You remember now?"

"Mrs. Crosby, we've been fools." Muldrew strode angrily about the room. "Did you see what he took away with him?"

"No, I didn't see anything, and I made a point of meeting him in the hall as he left. He was so nice and grateful. I thought, maybe, it was a paper—something small like that."

Muldrew started. "Was there a letter came for me on the night mail?"

"Yes. I put it ——" Mrs. Crosby rose and stared down on the night-table beside the bed. "I'm—I'm certain I put it there, right there—on the pad, where you'd see it as soon as you came in! You told me not to leave it in the box. Then that was—what he got!"

"I'm afraid it was." Muldrew sighed. "After all, it's not important. That letter had served its purpose—a double purpose now. I know its contents, word for word. . . . And now, Mrs. Crosby, no more of that. No one must be able to deceive you again. In future don't bother about the voice. Listen for the words. No one who telephones will be me unless he starts the conversation with the day of the week, and ends with the month. Get that solidly in your head: the first word will be the day of the week, the last the month. Anything else will be—worth listening to and ignoring. It's my fault that we didn't prepare for this years ago."

Mrs. Crosby's eyes were full of tears, and Muldrew laughed and patted her shoulder.

"My fault, all my fault. I'm supposed to be a detective."

He returned to the sitting-room, running over in his mind the names of those who knew his telephone

number, since it was deliberately kept from the telephone-book. A few of his intimate friends knew it. But who else?

Jacoby stifled a yawn as he entered. "It's been a hard day for me, too, Mr. Muldrew. I guess it's been worse for you; only I'm not so hardened to excitement. Even losing a job, too, shouldn't exhaust me, I suppose, like the job you've got on your hands. I won't starve, at any rate. But I must admit I'll sleep better when I know you're well on the way to the murderer. I'm out of the Club, but that doesn't relieve me of a certain sense of responsibility for what happened while I was there. It's going to worry me a lot."

Muldrew lay back luxuriously in his chair. "I'm a bit fagged myself, Jacoby. As to clues—I always make the same answer: there never was a murder that left no clues . . . if the detective is smart enough to see them. If murderers realized that there'd be fewer murders. . . . The murder at the Wanderers' Club was no exception. I'm certain we'll discover the cause of the murder, but getting our hands on the murderer is another matter. By the way, was Mr. Shipman very angry when he dismissed you?"

"Not outwardly at first, but there was a cold venom about it that—well, he was more furious than I ever thought he could be." Jacoby fixed his eyes on a worn spot in the carpet and frowned. "I've a funny feeling about Mr. Shipman. The mistake I made doesn't seem to call for the way he treated me. Behind a forced control was a fury intense enough to commit murder himself—if he could have got away with it. He took me into his office and slashed me to bits with his tongue. Not noisily, you understand, but bitterly and viciously. Talked about the ethics of it! As if the Wanderers' Club has any! All ethics means there is that the members can say and do what

they like within the Club walls. I tell you, I've seen things—and heard things. Nobody'd believe what some of those wealthy fellows turn out to be when they're natural."

"You don't mean evil—criminal?" Muldrew asked, almost indifferently.

Jacoby shook his head. "I'm not saying what I mean. What I heard or saw while I was a Club servant is locked in my head. I forgot myself when I got thinking of the way the Secretary treated me."

Muldrew wondered. Had Jacoby really forgotten himself.

"Just one question: Is Mr. Shipman popular with the other members?"

"He used to be. . . . I should say he's not nearly so popular lately. Between ourselves, I think they realize he hasn't the qualifications. . . . But that doesn't mean my dismissal was undeserved."

"Did Bill Draycott deserve to be dismissed?"

The question, shot out in the tone Muldrew knew so well how to use on occasion, caught Jacoby unprepared. But he rallied quickly.

"You think I fired Bill Draycott. You know it was my job to handle the bell-boys. . . . You also know Bill was the best of the bell-boys. But you don't know that, after all, the members control everything."

"You mean you didn't dismiss him?"

"Ask Mr. Shipman." Jacoby smiled. "Or I could mention members. . . . But it's not my business to discuss Club affairs—that is, what happened during my time there. I'll say, however, there were complaints. I had to take notice of them."

"You mean that members complained of the boy? Perhaps you'll tell me who they were."

Jacoby was silent, thinking it over. "No, I can't

do that . . . . except that Mr. Shipman was one of them."

"At least you can tell me of what they complained," Muldrew persisted.

"At first the complaints were general . . . but I knew right away it was his relationship to the murdered girl that made him seem undesirable about the Club. It wouldn't look well to have him there. Besides, it meant more police poking about—talking to Bill, and all that. And to the Wanderers' Club police in sight are blasphemy, an outrage."

"I suppose," Muldrew could not help saying, "the murder of a girl on the premises was no outrage. Perhaps they forget—or want to forget—that everything points to the murder having been committed by someone in the building. Perhaps they don't care to remember there were fifty or sixty members there at the time of the murder, and every one of them had access to the visitors' room where the girl was murdered."

Jacoby shrugged.

"Perhaps they don't know there's been a second murder in the case—poor little Bill Draycott!"

Jacoby jerked forward in his chair. "Bill Draycott? That lad murdered? Why—why, I saw him only a few hours ago."

"The lad was murdered not two hours ago. And," dryly, "you have to remember that several people saw Jenny Draycott within a couple of hours of *her* murder. I happen to know who they were. Indeed, I know almost to the minute how she spent her forenoon."

Jacoby peered at him incredulously. "You know—all that?"

"There isn't much in the story of Jenny Draycott, alias Miss Luscombe, I don't know. She was a blackmailer!"

Jacoby gripped the arms of his chair. "How could you know that?"

"I have the letters to prove it."

"Then you must know—who she blackmailed. If you do, you know her murderer." Jacoby leaned forward, his eyes flashing. "Why don't you get busy? You know no one is so dangerous as the victim of blackmail, so murderous, indeed—yes, even the best of them."

"You think so?"

Jacoby straightened. "If I were blackmailed I might stop at nothing—under certain conditions. And I don't think I'm worse than the average. When you get the man she blackmailed, or attempted to blackmail, you have the best evidence you can hope to get. Don't forget that anyone could get into the visitors' room.

"You detectives," he continued, when Muldrew remained silent, "have ways of digging out the facts when you get your hands on a clue like that. . . . You've worked fast, Mr. Muldrew, if I may say so. . . . I suppose you found the letters among the girl's effects? But that would scarcely convince a jury, for the letters might not have been sent. But perhaps you have ——"

"They were sent—and received," Muldrew said. "But I did not get them from the girl's effects. Someone got ahead of me there. No, the first trace I had of them I found in a more convincing place . . . Jenny Draycott dropped a purse when she was murdered."

"But—but it was such a small purse," Jacoby said. "I don't see ——"

"You saw the purse, then?"

"Ye—es, I saw it. I left it for the police, of course. . . . Dr. Thorensen saw it too."

"Did Thorensen open it?"

"Not that I saw. But much of the time I wasn't in the room. I couldn't stand the blood, the damned brutality of it!" The words came hissing through set teeth. "But to find the letters in the girl's purse doesn't prove they were sent. I'm looking at it as a juryman would, as a judge would. Of course, if they were replies to blackmail ——" He scrutinized Muldrew's face for a moment, awaiting an answer that did not come. "If I knew to whom those letters were sent, or who sent them to her, I might help." A look of cunning appeared on his face. "Why—why, of course: they were for—or from—Dr. Blaney!"

"That," said Muldrew, "would mean less than nothing, since Dr. Blaney was not in the building at the time of the crime. Dr. Blaney's association with the murdered girl is simply explained; it was frankly explained by the Doctor himself. He had treated her—a charity case ——"

"You believe that," Jacoby queried, "a girl like that?"

"It would convince any jury. To me it's immaterial. There is no cause to consider his association with her anything but professional. She might wish to see him again, and she happened to be aware of his habit of taking coffee at that hour at the Club. Doctor Blaney, at any rate, is out of it, because that morning he fortunately broke that habit. . . . But, to tell you the truth, the letters did not come from her purse."

Muldrew was satisfied. Jacoby knew of the purse. How well he knew had yet to be discovered.

"No," he continued, "I got them from one of the blackmailed men—I should say *a* blackmailed man."

"Then there were several? If I could see the letters," Jacoby ventured. "I know the Club members.

I'll assist the police to the limit. I'd give my right hand to know who murdered Jenny Luscombe."

Muldrew, watching through his lashes, saw the man's teeth grit together.

"I'm sorry, Jacoby. I can't show you the letters because they've been stolen from me."

A light flashed into Jacoby's eyes, and was gone so quickly that Muldrew was unconvinced of its reality.

"How unfortunate! Then you have no proof. . . . But the man will give you others, of course—if there are any."

"There's a pile of them. . . . But they're beyond me now. In fact, the ones I had were not given me. I got them—somehow—never mind how. . . . But I was beaten in the end. Fortunately the evidence was not all stolen."

Jacoby half rose in his excitement. "I can see it, then?"

"Not likely. If I intended to show it you'd have seen it earlier. No, it wouldn't be fair. You've made up your mind the victim of Jenny Draycott's blackmail is her murderer. I don't say so."

Jacoby picked up his hat. "If that's all, Mr. Muldrew——I'm dreadfully tired." He stifled a yawn. "I only hope I can be of service to you."

"You may be," Muldrew offered, as he led the way to the front door.

The moment the door closed Muldrew darted upstairs, seized his hat, and, rushing down through the kitchen, reached a side-street through the lane that ran behind the house.

He was too late to see Jacoby cross the end of the street, but someone else passed. Muldrew lifted his head and laughed. It was Tiger Lillie.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TERRIFIED REPORTER

TIGER LILLIE, when he left the janitor's apartment and the body of little Bill Draycott, lingered in the shadows across the street until Muldrew came out. The Detective was not telling all he knew, and Tiger hoped to gain that information by trailing his friend.

Thus he saw Jacoby and Muldrew meet and return to the former's house. When they took a taxi he suspected their destination and, getting a taxi of his own, arrived before them. Jacoby was being forced into the picture more and more, and Tiger was badly in need of new leads.

The silence of the two afternoon papers concerning the murder had been Tiger's work. He had, without difficulty, convinced his own immediate superior, Jerry Inkerley, that only by silence would he, Tiger, be able to pursue with effect the clues he himself had unearthed. And Jerry had managed to keep the news out of *The Gazette* by pointing to the inside information Tiger had secured by being first on the scene, which information would be at the disposal of the rival paper, with what Tiger might uncover later, if *The Gazette* would say nothing about the murder until the next day.

Following his plan, Tiger had been disappointed at the early results of the switch-board in the Cullen Apartments; and he was calling himself names for a wasted evening when Muldrew arrived on the scene. As usual, the Detective moved in an aura of thrills.

The tragic events that followed had served only to confuse the reporter. As he saw it, no two pieces of the puzzle fitted together, though he knew it all as part of the murder of Jenny Draycott. In the murder of the bell-boy he had found not a single directing clue, and Muldrew looked like his one hope. For the Detective, he surmised, was not equally befogged.

From a dark doorway across the street he saw Muldrew and Jacoby enter the house where the Detective had his room, and when Jacoby emerged he fell in behind with no definite plan in mind. It was the one thing that offered, since Muldrew was evidently in for the night. What confused Tiger more than anything else was the friendly relations between Detective and ex-servant of the Wanderers' Club at their parting.

He had gone less than a block in Jacoby's wake when the latter turned and beckoned. Tiger tried to appear oblivious of it, but when the invitation persisted he could ignore it no longer.

Jacoby greeted him with an indulgent smile.

"Young man, the one thing to admire about the amateur sleuth is his zeal."

"I don't know what you mean," Tiger replied weakly.

"You know, Lillie, you owe me something better than that. It was I who called up your paper this morning and told it of the murder."

Tiger discarded his mask. "Say, is that so? It was mighty decent of you. I wonder," tilting his head speculatively, "why you did it."

"So did your friend Muldrew." Jacoby laughed. "He knows now—though I seem to be unpopular all round for it. Let's walk on."

They started away, Tiger more and more confused Jacoby plainly enjoying himself.

"As you know, I've just left the man who, more than anyone else, dislikes what I did. Muldrew, the smartest Detective in the city, doesn't seem to like the newspapers. . . . But that doesn't convince me I was wrong. Are you going to?"

"I don't see what I've done ——" Tiger began.

"Not you, but your paper. I called *The Star* up to get publicity for the crime—and you carefully kept out every mention of it. Perhaps you can explain. I'm mighty glad we met: I wanted to ask that question."

His voice had dropped to a cold, imperative note.

Tiger bristled. "You'll have to ask Jerry Inkerley, our city editor. He's boss. I've no doubt he had some idea about it."

"Hm-m —— I'm glad someone had an idea. Mr. Muldrew doesn't seem overburdened with them. In fact, I've given him the only clue worth following—and I didn't notice much gratitude. . . . I don't believe he intends to follow it up—just because he wasn't the one to discover it. The police are much the same everywhere; that's why I called up *The Star*. Perhaps you wonder why. I'll tell you; because I can't get it out of my head that in a way I'm responsible for what happened in the Club building."

"I wouldn't be too critical of *The Star*, Jacoby," Tiger said, selecting his words. "It may yet accomplish what you intended it should. It would help if I knew the clue you gave Muldrew."

"From what I told him he was able to figure out that Jenny Luscombe was a blackmailer."

Tiger uttered an exclamation of surprise. "That explains a lot. . . . It probably explains why she was murdered—and therefore who murdered her."

"Any sane man would come to the same conclusion.

All Muldrew has to do is to find her victims . . . . and he knows them already, for he has some of the letters."

Tiger whistled softly. "Then it must be a member of the Wanderers' Club. They're just the sort she would blackmail—and they've the money to pay. That's why she went to the Club to-day." He looked about excitedly, as if this latest piece of information altered even the world about him. "Following that to its logical conclusion, Doctor Blaney is her murderer. Only ——"

"Yes, 'only,'" Jacoby broke in irritably. "If it was that simple we wouldn't need the police. The 'only' of it is that Doctor Blaney wasn't in the Club at the time."

Tiger's excitement was growing. "There'd be more than one victim. She wouldn't stop with one. There may be a dozen among the members of the Club. . . . And among them may be a certain trio who kept themselves too carefully away from the scene of the crime—sticking to the reading-room when everyone else was crowded into the Club lobby. Just what a guilty man would do."

They had passed Markham Street long ago, and were walking now in a quiet section of the city. It was almost midnight, and about them the city seemed to be asleep. Tiger noticed nothing; he bubbled with thoughts that promised exciting paragraphs for to-morrow.

"Yes, sir, there's a lead. It looked funny to me at the time—those three sitting there alone in the reading-room. There was Jimmy Dolan, and Forrest, and Lansing." He glanced slyly at Jacoby. "Doesn't it look like wizardry, being able to keep it out of the paper till we've—got what we want? It was I managed that. Blackmail! Gosh!"

Jacoby laid a hand on his shoulder. "Of course, I suspected you had a hand in it, but I wanted to make sure. I thought it might have been a plan of Muldrew's."

"Gordy had nothing to do with it. Fact is, he was peeved about it."

"How did he feel when he found that poor kid, Bill Draycott, murdered as well?"

Tiger had avoided speaking of the tragedy at the Cullen Apartments, partly because there was so much else on his mind, partly because he was not yet prepared to be frank with Jacoby. Now he told the story as he knew it, drawn into flights of imagination by such an eager listener.

"What surprises me," Jacoby said, "is that Bill's murderer didn't make things safer for himself by putting the boy's mother out of the way as well. If she ever recognizes him — and she might — it's all up with him. . . . You say Lansing was in the building. What did Muldrew think of that?"

Tiger scowled. "He didn't seem much concerned about it. Of course, we've no proof that he went near the Draycott apartment, and he certainly couldn't have killed the boy because he wasn't there long enough, and Bill was dead too long when we found him. Besides, I'd been trying to get the apartment on the telephone long before he came, so Mrs. Draycott must have been trussed up then."

"Still," Jacoby protested, "it links up too nicely to be ignored. Somehow, somewhere, Lansing is mixed up in the crime." The hand on Tiger's shoulder gave a friendly squeeze. "You and I seem to be fitting the pieces together more successfully than your detective friend. And," his forehead lined and his hands clenching, "I'm telling you, Lillie, that I'm

going to find the murderer of Jenny Luscombe—Draycott, I mean—if I do nothing else in life. The police can go their own way ; I'm going mine. . . . And that leads to a way you can help, Lillie. I need help. How about it ? "

In Tiger's mind was a picture of a discomfited Muldrew—of a short cut to facts and theories for which the Detective still groped.

" I'm with you," he said.

" I knew you would be. What we're going to do—or try to do—won't handicap the police in any way, and if it leads to anything important we'll hand it over to them. All I want is speed, because time is always in favour of the murderer."

Jacoby struck a faster pace, and for a couple of blocks they moved along in silence.

" Lillie," Jacoby said suddenly, " I'm going to make a confession : Jenny Luscombe was not quite a stranger to me. Don't ask how I know, but I do know she had another apartment, a third one. And the police do not know of it."

Tiger shook his head doubtfully. " Do you think we should keep that from them ? Muldrew has been trying to find out ——"

" Is it ever wise to be utterly frank with the police, Lillie ? Are you always frank with your Detective friend ? The information might not be worth anything to them . . . . and it might —— Don't ask questions, but I have a reason for wishing to go through that apartment myself before the police search it. I'm putting you on your honour not to tell. Of course, it will come out in time, but till the murderer is found I want particularly to keep out of it. Then I'll tell *The Star* a story that will open their eyes. In fact, I may be able to give you head-lines within a day or two."

He drew the quivering reporter into a dark doorway.

"I'll go on now and see if the way is clear. No use getting you into a row if there is one. But listen for me. Her apartment is around the corner. Stay here. I'll come and get you if the thing can be worked."

Jacoby departed with a mysterious shake of the finger.

Tiger stepped out into the street and watched his companion vanish round the corner. The darkness of the doorway, combined with the silence of the street, oppressed and unnerved him. As he turned to stroll back a dark shadow down the street faded into the gloomier shadows of the walls. Tiger wheeled. He had an almost over-powering inclination to run—to shout to Jacoby ; but the street was deserted. Tingles ran up and down his spine as he hurried toward the corner. And each time as he looked back he saw that threatening, mysterious shadow that vanished as he looked.

At the corner Jacoby was not to be seen. Tiger recognized where he was, though he had never been in that district after dark before. There was something uncanny about a section so busy by day being so empty and echoing by night, and he shivered as he passed back and forth in the doubtful comfort of the corner light.

He began to question the wisdom of what he and Jacoby were doing. Besides, was it safe ? Suppose something had happened to Jacoby ! He wondered at himself for falling so readily into a plan so dubious and assuredly so dangerous, and with a man he had known only a few hours. Was it treason to Muldrew ? Could the information Jacoby had given be properly hidden from the police ? He had been put on his honour not to tell, but ——

He knew exactly the doorway where the shadow that haunted him had taken cover, and he almost made up his mind to rush back and face it. But the silence and darkness of the street killed the plan before it was properly formed. In such a deserted street anything was possible—and Tiger had no wish to test the possibilities on himself. An experience in the Fourth Dagger case had taken his nerve in situations like that.

A light in a store window half a block ahead sent him hurrying toward it. It was a drug store, and Tiger entered, breathless and unsteady.

"May I use your —— Oh, I see." At the rear of the store was a telephone booth, and he started toward it, looking over his shoulder as he went, for the store appeared to be empty. As he reached the little door an ancient, sinister-looking man with a humped back rose from behind the counter. The long, hooked nose, the deep-sunk eyes, the hollow cheeks, the sneering lips seemed to Tiger to be part of a hideous nightmare. He shut the door on himself with a slam.

He called up Muldrew's room. No one answered. In a panic now, he got in touch with the police station, only to be informed in Sergeant Coddling's sleepy tones that Muldrew didn't *live* there. Tiger hung up. For a few moments he fiddled with the receiver, struggling to muster up courage to go out and face that silent, sinister face. Still, the old man was a human being. Better that than the dark streets and the mysterious shadows that pursued him. He would wait in the store till Muldrew returned to his lodging-house, or watch for Jacoby from the doorway.

But the old man was no longer in sight when he left the booth, and Tiger's footsteps rang ominously through the dimly-lighted store. Impossible to hang about a place like that. Outside he could at least

run—could make tracks for home and the busier streets.

Jacoby was not in sight when he came out into the open air, and Tiger started in the opposite direction, convinced that something had happened to his companion, and that his part was to see that it did not happen to him. The street seemed darker than ever. Once again he glanced back over his shoulder and saw the little old man peering at him through the bottles in the store window ; and as he looked the lights blanked out.

Every doorway became a menace then, every black lane a hiding-place for lurking perils. Tiger edged to the outside of the side-walk, and presently took frankly to the road. Before he realized it he was running —for behind him he distinctly heard someone approaching—coming at a pace even faster than his own. He began to gasp for breath, more frightened than winded. His heart pounded painfully. What a fool to come to such a place at such an hour ! What had happened to Jacoby ? What was going to happen to him now ? If only he could make that corner—and the light there ! His pursuer was gaining on him !

At the corner Tiger turned. He could run no longer, and he would fight with his face to the peril at his back. As he struck out his hands were caught in an iron grip and he was flung around the corner.

" Tiger, you young ass ! You've led me a chase. I couldn't shout—in this place."

Tiger slumped weakly against the wall, his knees shaking.

" Gordy ! Thank God ! I had the gee-bees that time for fair. But it was a dirty trick, slinking along like that after a friend on a dark street. I saw you skulking back there. Why did you do it ? "

Muldrew caught his arm and hurried him along.

"You didn't see me, Tiger. I was following the man who was following you."

"Then why don't we go back and nab him?" With Muldrew Tiger would face anything.

"Because it would mean nothing. He has as much right to be there as I have. . . . Probably more right than you. Besides, I don't want him to know I was following him. Come on. All I want is to get out of this. It's no time for making a fuss."

CHAPTER XIX

VALUABLE ADVICE

A GROUP of men was gathered in the reading-room of the Wanderers' Club. The hour eleven in the morning, a cup of coffee before each.

"Damn good thing you weren't here for coffee yesterday morning, Blaney!" a thin-chinned man gurgled behind *The Morning Times*. "I see they're giving the Club a good old razz this morning. Sort of hinting, I'd call it—as if strange and terrible things went on here. Getting pretty near slander, isn't it, Jimmy?"

"Better call it libel, Bobby," Dolan laughed.

"Call it what you like," Bobby grunted, "but what I say is, the way everyone likes to take a dig at us—it ain't fair, or reasonable, or ——"

"The only thing they think about, Bobby," said Dolan, "is, is it safe? You're too thin-skinned, my boy. You ought to go into politics and develop a hide. . . . If they ever got personal, however, in a case like this." He spread his fat hands.

"They're personal enough about Blaney," Shipman observed. "As Bobby says, it would have been nasty for him if he hadn't broken his custom yesterday morning and stayed away from the Club."

Blaney laughed easily. "Providence looks after fools and babies." He took a fresh cup of coffee from a bell-boy and slowly dropped into it four lumps of sugar.

"Oh, yeah?" Jimmy Dolan pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Some of you fools—or are you babies?—will be working Providence overtime if you don't look out."

"Is the bear going to get us?" Blaney teased.

But no one laughed. A silence of several moments fell over the room, during which Dolan sipped noisily at his coffee.

"Don't get us confused with your clients, Jimmy," Thorensen said.

"You'd at least have a chance, if you were clients of mine," Dolan returned. "I've got some of the worst crooks off. . . . Of course," slowly stirring his cup, "some are too clever to need a lawyer."

Again that silence. It was Wendell Forrest broke it:

"I hope none of us will have to call on Jimmy—in spite of the hints in *The Times*."

"I've been known," Dolan said, "to have clients who were *really* innocent. They needed me, nevertheless. . . . One never knows."

Through the vague murmur of protest Lansing's voice was heard:

"Jimmy's right. . . . The innocent need defence sometimes equally with the guilty."

"That's so," Shipman agreed. "The innocent are more often suspected than the guilty. There's only one guilty; there may be a score suspected."

The sentiment of the room veered quickly to approval. Doctor Blaney chuckled.

"Since it seems to be unanimous, who's going to be the first to retain Jimmy's services? I've thought of it first, but I'm going to give way to my friends. And, judging by what happened, and the hints in *The Times*, I should be the one to jump for him. . . . By the same token, if the talk on the street has foundation,

we'll need a battery of lawyers. Jimmy's profession is in for some hefty pickings."

"Until the police openly suspect some of us ——" Lansing began. He was seated at a writing-desk, where for fifteen minutes he had occupied himself with meaningless scrolls on club paper, neglecting his coffee. "Myself, I haven't much faith in them."

"If the police can't help the Club out," Dolan murmured, "who can? The best we can wish is that they find the murderer quickly. Delay may hurt the Club, but it hurts the members individually a great deal more."

Shipman changed from one chair to another. "Yes, yes, that's right. The notoriety of it!"

"I wish to God I'd been a thousand miles away yesterday morning!" Forrest growled fervently. "It's a slur on every one of us."

Doctor Blaney listened with a slight smile at the corners of his lips.

"We might sit here till doomsday protesting innocence—and wishing, but what we have to do is to give the police every assistance. Until the crime is solved, every one of us is under a cloud."

Thorensen guffawed. "Safety first. I'll retain Jimmy right now." He threw a penny on the table before Dolan. "Now I'm ready to help the police. What's the first step toward a general whitewash, Jimmy?"

Dolan did not smile. They watched him pocket the coin.

"Thorensen," he said, "has retained me—for two seconds. Time's up. Who next? Anyone else wish to play safe—at the same rate—for the same time?"

"But it's too serious for this, boys," Shipman said plaintively. "We must think of the Club. This Club

doesn't stand for—for things like that. We must clean its skirts. It's serious. It's ——"

"To be continued in our next." Dolan waved an insulting hand. "In a way you're right, Shipman. This Club needs to clean its skirts. . . . And the one way to do it is to clean our own, each of us individually."

Several demanded what he meant.

"I mean," said Dolan, "that every one of us must be utterly frank with the police—make a clean breast of it. Yes, I'm talking seriously. I never was more serious in my life, but don't misunderstand me. I don't want the job of defending any member of this Club, even the most innocent. I don't want it—I won't do it. And the best way to save legal expenses is to realize, all of you, that everyone in this building yesterday at eleven-thirty to twelve is under a cloud."

Thorensen laughed shortly. "Don't rub it in, Jimmy. Don't we know it?"

"Do you know it well enough to act on it? *Have you—all been—frank with the police?*"

An uneasy silence was broken by the stirring of spoons and the clatter of cup against saucer.

"I'd hate," said Thorensen, with a mirthless laugh, "to have to prove that I couldn't have been mixed up in it. I was here. I doubt if anyone could swear where I was at the moment of the murder—as I couldn't swear about anyone else."

"And," Blaney added, "the fact that I wasn't known to be in the building at the time wouldn't prevent my sneaking in the front door and getting to the visitors' room."

Shipman's sharp eyes kept moving from face to face. "That goes with me, too. I'm in the same box. Can any of us swear exactly where we were at a certain minute—I mean swear and prove it? Like the rest of

you, I believe, Muldrew suspects even me. Not of the murder, perhaps, but of concealing things. He almost made me feel like the murderer!" He tried to laugh; the result was only a painful twist to his face.

"And when," Thorensen boomed, "I assured him I'd never seen the girl before, that I'd never heard of her, that I knew nothing more of her than I saw there before my eyes ——"

"I hope," Dolan interrupted, "you didn't take time to put it that way to Muldrew. Methinks you did protest too much."

Thorensen looked like a thunder-cloud. "What the hell ——"

"Even the murderer would deny everything," Dolan continued, unmoved. "You surely don't think Muldrew would fall for anything so—so quaint! Now I," he chuckled, "was much cleverer than that. I confessed right away that I *had* seen the girl before."

They stared at him.

"Yes, it's the truth. That's where I got the start on the rest of you. And Muldrew probably suspects me less than any of you. I had nothing to conceal."

"But if we *didn't* know her—if we'd never seen her," Forrest clamoured.

"Yes," Thorensen repeated, "if we knew nothing of her, what else could we say?"

"You might tell the truth," Dolan replied. There was a crisp note in his voice that silenced them for a moment.

"A nasty hint," Lansing growled.

Dolan laughed as the others applauded. "To those to whom it's due I apologize. Perhaps I should have said you might have told *all* the truth. Come, come!" as the murmur grew. "Look into your souls. Have you all told *all* the truth? Muldrew is no fool—nor am I. Don't interrupt, please. From years of

association with crime and innocence, and the police, I'm going to give you the most valuable advice I ever gave—and it's free: Nothing so allays suspicion, nothing proves innocence so convincingly, as a complete clean breast of everything. I give that advice to the innocent. The guilty must decide for himself."

Lansing spoke up from the writing-desk where he sat:

"Everything, Jimmy? Just what do you mean—how far would you go? Where would you draw the line?"

For a moment the question seemed to upset Dolan's poise.

"I know," he said, "I'm giving advice that takes the bread and butter from my own mouth. . . . Lansing touches the one weak spot in that advice: What does everything mean? The only answer I can give is that it varies with the case."

"Then you take back what you advised?" Forrest asked.

"My advice is ended," Dolan declared uneasily. "Each must interpret it for himself."

"Yeah," Shipman sneered, "you advise engaging a criminal lawyer to explain to us."

Dolan leaned forward, staring straight into Shipman's eyes.

"Far from it. I've said I won't take the case of the most innocent of you—or the most guilty, for that matter. You want to know why? Because I'd be certain you'd be as secretive with me as you are with the police." He glowered at his cup. "No, I'm not taking anything back; you must tell all the truth, make a clean breast—everything—everything."

Thorensen thrust out his chin. "You insist, Jimmy, that we've something to hide. I call it damned impertinence, an insult!"

"I insist that not all of you have told all the truth. Those the charge does not fit needn't feel insulted. If I were Muldrew I'd suspect those who ——" He ended with a shrug and swallowed the last of his cup.

Forrest said:

"Is there one of us with nothing to hide? Let's be honest. Would the best of us like our lives to be unfolded before the world? Perhaps it's the police we fear; perhaps it's—someone else. I've spots here and there to hide—we all have. Don't quibble about it, Thorensen; you're no better than the rest of us. But, Jimmy, what I'd like to say is that to tell everything would expose to the light of day sores that can only shock and do no good. . . . There are worse things even than arousing the suspicions of the police."

Dolan shrugged. "Permit me an epigram: A mistake confessed is the best guarantee it will not be repeated."

"Except when it's confessed to you, Jimmy," Blaney laughed. "I should think you'd have heard so many worthless confessions in your job you'd despair of such a guarantee. Confession to you, in fact, is the surest way of escaping punishment—and that's about all."

"I don't ask you to confess to me," Dolan said.

Thorensen laughed nastily. "God, Jimmy, you must have a lot of dirty stories locked up in your head. Well, count me out. I'm confessing nothing."

"Perhaps it's that secrecy of yours that leads the public to—over-estimate your faults, Thorensen," Dolan retorted.

"Thank Heaven, our reputations aren't in your hands, Jimmy," was all Thorensen replied.

Forrest said: "I was coming to that—things leaking out and being magnified. Police suspicion is

the least of the perils of confession. What about blackmail?"

Dolan turned his head slowly until his eyes met Forrest's. "Do you suspect the police of blackmail, Wendell?"

"Not the police. But what gets you—you don't know where it'll end."

There was a chorus of approval.

"Something in that," Dolan agreed. "I didn't advise whispering your confession. What is public can't be used for blackmail. But if you tell it to the police I think you may rest assured it will go no farther."

Two or three commenced to speak together, but Thorensen's big voice drowned them out:

"Speaking of blackmail, Jimmy, what's the best way to fight it?"

Dolan did not answer at once. Every eye in the room was on him.

"That's a question, Thorensen," he said presently, "that can't be answered in a word. In this country there's a stiff law against the blackmailer. The only trouble is that we don't enforce it—as we don't enforce many of our laws."

"And we're all so susceptible to blackmail," Blaney said. "My own opinion is that there's mighty little in our records that isn't known or suspected. I'm inclined to think blackmail is something of a bogey."

Dolan shook his head fiercely. "Blackmail is the most despicable game, the meanest, the dirtiest ——"

"The blackmailer," Lansing snarled, "deserves a lingering death. It almost condones murder ——"

"The law," Dolan broke in hastily, "is such that a blackmailer is subject to a penalty only less than that for murder—if we cared to call on it; and the act that is made the subject of blackmail is not revealed

in court. In England they even conceal the name of the victim. You recall the famous case of Mr. A., a powerful Indian potentate, as it developed. That the charge against him may have been true had nothing to do with the case—or the penalty."

"But," Forrest complained, "that doesn't protect us entirely. There's always the danger that the blackmailer will make his charge public before the law can close his lips. That's why it's often better to pay. . . . Isn't it?" he asked, after a pause.

Dolan delayed to reply so long that several feet moved impatiently.

"As a lawyer," he said, "I'd say there never was such a case. As a man. . . . I'm less certain. Looking on from the outside, I'd say blackmail should always be ignored—or proceeded against. But—but ——" Again he hesitated; Thorensen cleared his throat—"but there is, in real life, a threat few can face. To defy it is to take a chance ——"

"And so," Lansing burst out bitterly, "he pays—and pays. And once he pays he's helpless."

"A man must consider his wife, for instance," Forrest said.

"Or his profession," Thorensen added.

Blaney tapped his cigar thoughtfully on the tray. "I can insert a timely word in this very case. I too knew the girl. . . . And I too, like Jimmy, admitted it without hesitation." He told them of the girl's professional visits. "I confess that for a moment I was inclined to hide all that, to say I'd never seen her. It was that Detective's eyes boring into me, I guess, that dragged it out in time. Because," with a smile, "I'm no braver than the rest of you. At any rate, it saves me the expense of retaining Jimmy here."

Shipman laughed nastily. "You've given us advice, Jimmy. You've asked who's going to play safe and

engage a lawyer. Who are you going to retain for your own safety? I seem to remember that you were here yesterday when the crime was committed."

"Your memory is better than your temper, Shipman." Dolan rolled his tongue across his lips and squinted at the ceiling. "You see, I'm in the profesh, and so I'll hold off till the necessity arises. . . . In the meantime I might engage a private detective and forestall the police—that is, if I were so far above suspicion that I dare do it. Unfortunately, as Shipman says, I'm not above suspicion. I'm in as deeply as any of you—from what we know now. But I've taken my own advice, at least. You," looking them over in turn, "you don't intend to; I see that. And I'm telling you it's a mistake, a hideous mistake . . . and someone is going to pay the penalty."

He rose and wiped his hands on a huge handkerchief. "Think about it," he advised as he left the room.

CHAPTER XX

FACING A TARTAR

In the lobby Dolan almost collided with Muldrew. He nodded toward the reading-room and winked.

"You've got 'em all cornered now, Muldrew. I've put the fear of God in them. Go to it; the seed is planted ready for the harvest."

Muldrew showed no sign of interest. "You know as well as I, Jimmy, that it's those who seem to fear neither God nor man who give us our work." He passed on, leaving Dolan with a heavy frown on his face.

Muldrew did not go directly to the reading-room. He preferred to plant his own seed; it enabled him to appraise more surely the harvest to be reaped. A strange face was behind the counter at the rear of the lobby, and Muldrew introduced himself.

While he was talking Shipman emerged from the reading-room. Involuntarily he pulled up on seeing the Detective, then came on with a slight scowl.

"You promised you'd expose the Club to as little publicity as possible, Mr. Muldrew," he said, the fingers of one hand tapping the counter impatiently.

"Have you heard of the murderer being found?" Muldrew threw back. "I suppose if I were a member of this Club my presence would still be offensive."

"But you're not a member," Shipman retorted uncertainly. "You're a detective, a policeman, and that's all that matters now."

"You're right—I'm a policeman . . . . and that's all that matters now—and until the murderer is found." He turned his back to the counter and leaned his elbows on it. "Mr. Shipman, does the world, the outer world, mean so much to you, to the members of the Wanderers' Club? Has it meant enough to prevent a murder within its walls? You don't answer. Well, get this fixed in your mind. The Wanderers' Club means no more to me at this time than the lowest pool-room in the city. Get this, too, in your mind. You over-estimate the importance of the Wanderers' Club in the eyes of the public—an ego-complex. You needn't fear that the public is standing outside the door there, watching me come and go." His voice had grown hard. "Such sensitiveness is ridiculous."

It took the fight out of the Secretary. He laughed apologetically.

"I suppose you're right. But this Club, you see, is my care. Can you wonder, with this awful tragedy hanging over us ——"

"All I wonder, Shipman, is your readiness to submerge even the discovery of the murderer in your anxiety for the Club."

"But—but I'm not. I want to do all I can to help you."

"I suppose you thought of that when you dismissed one of the chief witnesses. And you permitted him to dismiss another employee who was here at the time of the crime, a cousin of the murdered girl. In fact, you removed every valuable bit of evidence about the place." He looked Shipman over contemptuously. "You may not know, because we managed to keep it out of the morning papers, that that young lad was murdered in the same way last night."

Shipman paled. "Won't you—won't you come into my office? This is terrible, terrible!"

Muldrew followed him in. "This new man you have in Jacoby's place, was he too recommended by a member?"

"Do you suggest," Shipman demanded angrily, "that Jacoby's recommendation—had anything sinister about it?"

"Not nearly as much as his dismissal," Muldrew retorted. "I think Jacoby was a better man for the job—in some ways—than you'll ever get again. An unusual man . . . . which makes him of more interest to the police. So unusual, I might say, that you threw him out, though you're not fool enough to have been blind to his importance to the police . . . Perhaps you can tell me more about him now, Shipman."

The Secretary paced restlessly about the room. "Why do you think so? Why should I conceal—anything? I consider I had good reason for dismissing him. If you'll permit me to say so, Mr. Muldrew, this Club doesn't need to consult the police about its servants."

"It might have been better had you done so," Muldrew returned grimly. "You continue to defy us, Shipman. All right. Do you wish the Club closed? We can do it, you know. Do you wish several of its members, including yourself, held as material witnesses? You've justified all this by your conduct. Naturally that wouldn't occur to you—what we might do. All you think of—I'd like to know just what you do think of, Shipman."

Every atom of defiance in Shipman's manner was gone. "I did everything for the best," he stammered. "If I made a mistake ——"

"An unprejudiced observer, then, would consider

you either a fool or a rogue. I'll be more charitable. Now, have you refreshed your memory as to Jacoby's address ? "

" I never knew it ; I'm telling you the truth," Shipman replied miserably.

Muldrew nodded. " Did you have anything to do with the dismissal of Bill Draycott ? I want the truth—and I might say I'm not asking for news."

Shipman rubbed his hands together. " And the poor boy was murdered ! It's too awful."

" Answer my question," Muldrew said sharply. " Did you have anything to do with his dismissal ? "

" I may—I may have mentioned it to Jacoby—I may have said it was—undesirable to have the girl's cousin in the building ; that's all."

" Yes, and you knew nothing more was necessary. It's no surprise to me."

" Then Jacoby must have told you," Shipman said slyly. " So you knew all the time where he is. You've been trying to frighten me."

" A man with nothing on his conscience is hard to frighten. Yes, I know where Jacoby is—in spite of you. The point that interests me—and the police—is that the Secretary of a Club should have in his employ an important servant like Jacoby without knowing where he lived. If that's your conception of your duty, it isn't mine. . . . I think the members might make an issue of it, if they knew.

" Now a second murder has been committed, and the police are not going to hide the fact that the victim was an employee of the Club at the time his cousin was murdered in it. How do you think that will relieve your anxiety about the Club ? " Muldrew rose. " And let me tell you, that if you lined up the members of this sacrosanct club of yours, and could induce them to tell the whole truth, you'd be staggered

to know how many of you are mixed up in both these crimes."

Shipman's lips parted and closed, parted and closed again.

"And," Muldrew added, "while you're lining them up put Jacoby among them."

He went out and made for the reading-room. Though he had come quietly, every man in the room looked up. For a full minute the Detective stood in the doorway looking them over, while papers rustled and feet shifted nervously. Blaney and Thorensen nodded. The former rose as if to speak to the Detective, but changed his mind and turned aside to pick up a paper from the table. Then he settled back in his chair and frankly let his eyes remain on Muldrew. A smile played about his lips.

Muldrew wheeled and disappeared. He went out to the street.

"Jimmy was right," he muttered. "The seed is planted . . . but what will the harvest be?"

The noon whistles were blowing as he was carried up to Dolan's office. The stenographer greeted him with a friendly smile, and Muldrew knew that as yet their talk was a secret between them. At the same time the glitter in her eyes showed that she had read the morning papers. Dolan received the Detective with a teasing smile.

"I thought you'd take the hint, Muldrew, but it doesn't seem to have smoothed out your troubles. Was I too optimistic? Wouldn't they talk?"

"I didn't tempt them, Jimmy, I didn't give them a chance. . . . But I'm grateful for your intentions."

Dolan studied him doubtfully. "You had your chance ——"

"I'm taking it—here."

"Hm—m! . . . You delight in taking chances,

Muldrew, don't you ?" He let his eye rove significantly over a clear desk. "This time I receive you in more fitting—less dangerous—surroundings, you see."

"You must have expected me," Muldrew returned.

The smile on Dolan's face stiffened. He had not expected Muldrew to face it so calmly, and the Detective's handling of insinuation peeved him.

"One learns, Muldrew. I make a point of learning quickly."

"There are professions that require it. I've a great respect for your common sense—and caution."

"Thank you. When I win the respect of the police ——" He laughed. "In my business I'm always learning, but my latest lesson was a surprise. I had never imagined that I must be prepared to receive the police."

"Many an innocent man to-day has reason to fear the police to-morrow," Muldrew replied, laughing too.

"The police and I cross each other's tracks too often for me to invite their attentions," Dolan said, but the attempt at lightness failed.

"Any criminal feels the same, Dolan."

The lawyer scowled. "You meant any *other* criminal, didn't you ? Go on, don't mind my feelings. Even in this office I suppose the police must be permitted some latitude—though there's a limit. . . . I ought to have known enough to keep valuable documents locked up."

"In your special line, yes," Muldrew agreed.

"At any rate," Dolan said, "every file is complete again. . . . Once I lose a document I never rest until I find it. I've built up a reputation on fastidiousness in that respect."

"But," Muldrew remarked, "some documents are never the same again, once they are lost."

Dolan dropped his eyes, but not in time to conceal the trouble in them. "The one danger is that they might have been photographed. That alone is evidence. Indeed," with a more confident smile, "I find a growing disposition in judge and jury to refuse to accept the unsupported word of the police. But you didn't desert a promising field to chatter. We're both busy men. Shoot."

Muldrew shifted his chair so that the light from the window no longer blinded him.

"I thought I'd find out what you meant when you said at the Club that the seed was planted for me. I want to know what I'm expected to reap."

Dolan shook his head. "Are you asking me to become a police spy—against members of my own Club?"

"Your hint was that—in effect. You know I suspect—I'm justified in suspecting—every man who was in the Club at the time of the murder."

"Including myself. All right, go to it. There were forty or fifty of us. I wish you luck—and offer my sympathy."

Muldrew remained calm. "I've had more hopeless looking tasks."

"You think," Dolan said, waving a finger toward the Detective, "that you've got a good start in the three of us you found in the reading-room ——"

"That wasn't the start, Jimmy," Muldrew corrected. "Your time came in due course. Go on."

"Because you saw us there trying to forget that mess in the visitors' room you thought you had a clue. You forget that some men can face blood more calmly than others. . . . There are men in the Wanderers' Club not so thin-skinned.

"One wouldn't expect Jimmy Dolan to shrink from anything in the way of crime."

Dolan's forehead wrinkled. "My association with crime is vicarious. I never before saw the victim of a murder. One can't accuse you, Muldrew, of welcoming assistance, but if you continue to refuse ——"

He settled back in his chair and glowered at the desk.

"I'll tell you, Muldrew, in spite of the way you turn down everything I do for you. I sat in that reading-room this morning with the men you suspect, the only men you can reasonably suspect. I talked. I think I talked with effect. If you don't hear some surprising confessions before night then I'm a policeman. You're welcome to them—and I owe the police nothing, except for badly-prepared cases against my clients. Like every other member of the Wanderers' Club—except the murderer, of course, if it was a member—I want that case cleared up, and cleared up quickly. . . . Between ourselves, I told them I wouldn't undertake the defence of any of them . . . and that's going pretty far for Jimmy Dolan."

Muldrew rose and walked to the window. There he turned and came back straight toward the desk.

"Jimmy," he said, leaning over the desk, "how about your own confession?"

Dolan started back. Then his face went crimson with anger.

"You dare—you dare to hint a thing like that? You dare insinuate that I'm hiding anything material?"

He had struggled to his feet and stood leaning over the desk, his face close to Muldrew's.

The latter shrugged. "You give me too much credit, Jimmy. I wasn't conscious of daring anything. You know the proof I have. Hand-writing has always been a fad of mine; I recognize it long after I've seen the original."

Dolan was silent, but he continued to glare. Then, abruptly, he turned away. At the rear of the room he leaned against the steel filing cabinets. He was perfectly cool now.

"I've nothing more to say, Muldrew. To remain longer will waste our time."

Muldrew accepted the dismissal. With a bow he made for the door. "Too bad, Jimmy, no one planted seed in you. I seem to be a duffer at it."

"You're a bigger duffer than you think," Dolan threw after him.

CHAPTER XXI

CONFESSIONS

As he passed Dolan's stenographer in the outer office Muldrew hesitated. There was much he would like to ask, much she might tell him, but the girl must already suspect his purpose, and the risk of being caught was too great. Besides, if the girl did talk it would not be fair to her.

While he stood waiting for the elevator, a door at the end of the corridor opened and Lansing hurried out.

"Oh, Mr. Muldrew, if you're free for a few minutes, I wish you'd come into my office."

Muldrew regarded him questioningly. "How did you know I was here?"

"Uh—Jimmy Dolan called me up," Lansing replied, in some confusion.

"Then Dolan knew you wished to see me."

"Yes—yes."

Muldrew followed him to his office and the door closed behind them. The one clerk Lansing employed was gone to lunch.

"You see—you see," Lansing stammered, "we were discussing that terrible murder at the Club this morning; and we thought—I thought it was only fair to the police to tell all I know, to make a clean breast—I mean, to tell everything. I did know the murdered girl—slightly."

"That doesn't surprise me," Muldrew said. "In fact, I already knew it."

"Did Dolan tell you?" Lansing demanded angrily. He had turned from locking the door.

"Jimmy never mentioned your name. Why should he? If there's one thing Jimmy can't be accused of it's helping the police."

"But it wouldn't be any help—even if he knew everything," Lansing quavered. "No one knows but myself—everything. . . . And I'm so afraid of being misunderstood."

"If you're frank I won't misunderstand."

"It isn't you I fear, but the—the public. I've no reason to fear the police," he declared, with an effort at dignity. "All I wanted to say was that I did know Miss Luscombe."

"But you never knew her, you never saw her, before a few months ago."

"Yes, yes, that's so. How did you know?"

"Because before that time Miss Luscombe did not exist; she was Jenny Draycott. You never knew her as Draycott. Jimmy Dolan did. She used to work for him."

"Why—I never knew that. . . . Ah, I see. That's how he came to know her. He said this morning that he told the police he knew her. So she worked for him. That—explains—a lot."

"Don't let your fancy roam too widely, Mr. Lansing," Muldrew warned. "Leave that to us. What connection Dolan had with Jenny Draycott has no connection with this. You were going to explain how you came to know her."

But Lansing's thoughts were not to be diverted. His eyes narrowed, and a flash of anger swept into his face. "It has more to do with this than you imagine, Mr. Muldrew. It explains—how she came to know so much about me."

Muldrew said nothing. Was Lansing arriving at

the truth before he himself had thought of it? Was one puzzle to be explained more simply than he expected? Then he remembered the blackmail letters he had lifted from Dolan's desk.

Lansing was talking in a low voice:

"I wondered—how she knew so much—about me." He looked up at the Detective and added quickly: "And about my friends."

"Such friends," Muldrew said, "as Wendell Forrest, and Doctor Thorensen, and Jimmy Dolan, and Doctor Blaney, and Shipman, to mention a few. Never mind how I know. You all made mistakes, even Jimmy Dolan, in hiding anything. Of all of you Doctor Blaney was the only one to admit frankly at the start that he knew the girl."

"Because he was safe—he had an alibi," Lansing protested. "The rest of us—it was different with us."

"Blaney's connection with the girl was innocent enough. In that respect, too, it's different with the rest of you. But tell your story. I'm waiting."

Lansing ran his tongue nervously over his lips. "I don't know—what you're driving at, Mr. Muldrew. What I'm going to tell can't have any bearing whatever on the crime. All I know about Miss Luscombe is that she applied to me three or four months ago as a stenographer. I wondered why, because I hadn't any need of one, and in my special line I need only one anyway. She—she quite insisted."

"But if you had no place for a stenographer ——"

"She was a pretty girl," Lansing said, drops of perspiration gathering on his forehead. "Perhaps she thought—she may have thought I'd find a place. She may have thought I—I gave her hope. I didn't, really. . . . But she talked so readily and knowingly of my Club friends. That may be why she thought I might find an opening."

"Did she come more than once?"

"Ye—es."

"In the end what happened?"

"Nothing happened—of course, nothing at all. She found, I suppose, she had no chance, so she didn't come any more."

"And when you saw her dead at the Club you decided first that this was too dangerous to reveal to the police, and then ——"

"But it wasn't dangerous," Lansing protested.

"Then why did you hide it? The fact is, Mr. Lansing, your conscience is still prodding you, and for good reason. By the way, do you happen to have a cigar? I've missed lunch, and I want something between my teeth."

Lansing drew a red enamelled cigar-case from his pocket and opened it. Muldrew helped himself; and as he did the shadow of a satisfied smile creased his lips. The cigars in that case were the same brand as the stub he had taken from Dolan's tray.

"So that's all you have to tell?" he asked, rising.

"I thought the police should know," Lansing sighed.

"Is that—all you have—to tell?" Muldrew repeated.

"Why—yes. At least, it's all I can think of at the moment."

"Better do some more thinking," Muldrew advised, and left the office.

As he came out into the corridor a man walked swiftly along the branch hall and disappeared into the room beside Lansing's. Muldrew stood while he lit the cigar, his eyes fixed on the door that had closed behind the stranger. Then he followed and knocked.

At first there was no reply, but when the knock was repeated a bolt slipped softly back and a man's face

appeared in a crack. Muldrew pushed through, smiling blandly.

The office he entered was sparsely furnished—only a cheap desk and two chairs. The man he had pushed past stood glaring at him.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

Muldrew continued to smile. "Oh, I must have made a mistake. I'm so sorry. I thought this was where I'd find a friend of mine—his office. It must be on the floor below. So sorry."

He backed out, bowing apologetically. In the corridor his face lit up with excitement. "I wonder," he muttered, as he waited for the elevator; and he repeated the two words more than once before he reached the street.

At the police station he found Jacoby waiting for him.

"He wanted to wait for you in your office," the desk sergeant whispered. "These guys ought to try a new one."

Muldrew's greeting to Jacoby was warm. And there was no acting about it. Jacoby, he knew, held the key to part of the puzzle, at least; certainly he had information of value not yet divulged, whether deliberately or not.

When they were alone in his room Jacoby smiled wryly. "I don't know if I've come to the right place, Mr. Muldrew, but I'm concerned about a friend of yours, Tiger Lillie, the reporter."

"What's up with Tiger?" Muldrew asked.

Jacoby cleared his throat. "I've a confession to make. Last night when I left you I ran across Lillie, and we went for a walk. We—separated, and when I returned to where I had left him he was gone. It wasn't a nice part of the city, and I was a little alarmed. I called up *The Star* office this morning, but they knew nothing about him."

Muldrew told him Tiger was safe. "I've seen him since he had his walk with you—if it was last night."

"I'm so glad." Jacoby heaved a sigh. "I suppose I'm foolishly nervous after that affair at the Club yesterday. When I left him during the walk I expected to be gone only a few minutes, but I was longer than I expected. I suppose he got tired waiting."

Muldrew was thinking. "As a matter of fact, Jacoby, I came on him while he was waiting for you. I'm puzzled to understand what you were doing in that quarter of the city at that hour."

"Didn't he tell you?" Jacoby was watching the Detective's face.

"Tiger told me nothing—except that someone was trailing him."

Jacoby showed some excitement. "Trailing him—trailing us? Hm—m! . . . So Tiger told you nothing?"

"From his reticence I gather you told him not to tell. If you did, you can rest assured he wouldn't open his lips."

"I scarcely meant that he mightn't tell *you*. . . . You see, there was something I wished to do, and I wanted to do it alone. With Tiger, I mean."

"If you had no reason to keep it from me, why not tell me yourself now, Jacoby?"

"That's what I came to do. . . . I've a confession to make: I've lied to you."

"That's no confession, for I wasn't deceived. Of course you've lied. You're one of the many who have. Let's hear the truth now."

"I thought at the time I'd good reason for not telling everything, Mr. Muldrew. You'll see why. I knew the murdered girl. At least, she was not a stranger to me. At the time I was afraid to admit it, because I was the only one who was known to have

seen her alone in the visitors' room. You see how that frightened me. . . . The fact is, too, it wasn't Doctor Blaney she asked for."

Muldrew said nothing; he was wondering what lay behind this unexpected frankness.

"No," Jacoby went on, "it wasn't Doctor Blaney; it was Mr. Forrest."

Muldrew's surprise was genuine. "But he was there at the Club. Why didn't you bring him?"

"Because I knew the sort of girl she was—I knew what she probably wanted—and I didn't propose that she should have her chance right there in the Club building. It was to protect Mr. Forrest, and the reputation of the Club, that I didn't let him know she was there. I told you it was Doctor Blaney because he was not in the Club building at the time and could not come under suspicion."

"Why should you think Mr. Forrest or any other Club member needed such protection?"

"Because I knew Jenny Luscombe as a blackmailer."

Muldrew nodded. "I told you that last night. But how did you know?"

"Because she blackmailed me!"

The two looked at each other for several silent moments. All Muldrew saw was a tightening of the knot, a greater tangle. Jacoby seemed distressed at his own confession.

"Blackmail was her game," he continued. "I suppose others suffered as I did."

"So it wasn't Doctor Blaney she wished to see."

"No."

"That's strange, because Doctor Blaney admitted knowing her."

Jacoby shrugged. "I suppose there were several of the Club members she was trying to blackmail. They're the kind of men who'd be her meat."

"But Blaney's connection with her was innocent enough. She had been a patient of his. . . . Fortunately your lie hurts no one, since Blaney did not enter the building till half an hour or more after the murder. You knew Forrest was there—in the reading-room and so ——"

Jacoby's face lit up with excitement. "I knew he was there—somewhere. But he wasn't in the reading-room when I went around as if looking for Doctor Blaney. No, I'm quite sure he wasn't there. I didn't see him anywhere."

His wide, intelligent eyes were fixed on Muldrew significantly, but the Detective seemed not to notice.

"Why didn't you tell me all this yesterday?"

"As I said, I was frightened. Also, as a servant of the Club ——"

"You ceased to be a servant yesterday afternoon—long before I saw you last night," Muldrew reminded him.

Jacoby let his eyes drop. "I know . . . I didn't realize—until my walk last night with Lillie. I told him everything—and it relieved me so much I decided you should know. . . . You say someone was following us. That accounts for what happened. I'll tell you what I was there for—I was going to search another apartment Miss Luscombe had. I wanted to make sure there was nothing there that would show how it was possible for her to blackmail me. I was trying to protect myself from publicity. In the doorway to her apartment I was struck by someone in the dark. Feel that." He leaned forward and pointed to a lump near the crown of his head. "It stunned me, and when I came to I thought of nothing but getting away as far as I could. It must have been half an hour before I remembered Lillie."

"Another apartment, you say?" Muldrew was

interested. "That girl seems to have lived everywhere. Blackmail must have been profitable. Did *you* pay?"

"Yes—twice. I was going to defy her now. I saw it was hopeless to try to close her lips. She had learned something about me—it doesn't matter what. How I knew this address of hers—I met her there both times I paid. . . . When she recognized me at the Club she laughed in my face. That is one reason why I left her alone so long in the visitors' room. It gave her murderer his chance."

"How did she get in touch with you to blackmail you?"

"By letter to my rooming-place. Here are some of the letters." He drew several from his pocket and handed them to the Detective. "If you don't mind, please don't read them, unless you let me turn down the parts I don't wish seen."

Muldrew had extracted the sheets from the envelopes. He handed them back now, retaining the envelopes. Jacoby carefully turned down parts of several and returned them, and Muldrew read what was exposed. The writing, he saw, was the same as that of the letters he had taken from Dolan's desk.

"The envelopes are addressed by a different hand," he puzzled. "Jenny Luscombe probably wrote the letters, but the envelopes are addressed by a man. You noticed that?"

"They always came that way."

"It looks as if the girl was only a cat's-paw for a blackmailing gang. Perhaps she was driven to it by being out of work. She did the dirty, dangerous work . . . and she paid the whole penalty—until we find her murderer."

"You won't find her murderer among her confederates," Jacoby replied with some contempt, "but among her victims."

"And I," Muldrew bemoaned, "will have to exact a penalty from one of her victims, not from those who drove her to blackmail. That's too often the sort of job I have. While you're at it, Jacoby," he added, in a different tone, "you might as well come clean. I'm waiting for the rest."

Jacoby smiled uncomfortably. "There *is* more. I know you found no letters in Jenny Luscombe's purse, because—because I went through it myself before you arrived. I took out some small change. Here it is." He took a piece of paper from his pocket and emptied a few cents more than two dollars on the desk. "I did it to make it look like robbery. I knew no member of the Wanderers' Club would be accused of robbery. Also I wanted to make sure the purse contained nothing about me. I should have told you all this last night —I know it," he said despairingly, "but I hadn't the nerve."

Muldrew felt himself in a greater maze than ever. In the few minutes he had been with Jacoby the man had jumbled every clue, had given him more than he could digest. But it was not what Jacoby said but the new place he assumed in affairs that puzzled the Detective.

Muldrew said: "You've been very clever about it all, Jacoby, but most of what you tell me was not news. You made a mistake confessing in part. Let me tell the rest."

"You don't need to," Jacoby laughed. "I'm making a clean breast. I've confessed to being blackmailed. I've told you I lied about Doctor Blaney. I've admitted I wanted to go through the girl's rooms before the police. I've told you I searched her purse. And, of course, I found that rent receipt and telephoned a friend ——"

"And you gave him the key to her Chalfont

Apartment that you found in her purse. I saw the man talking to you at the Club door. He searched the apartment for you before we got to it."

"There doesn't seem much you didn't know or suspect," Jacoby said, with a wry twist of his lips. "But," he added, punctuating his words with a pointing finger, "what you didn't know even now is that I not only had no thought of handicapping the police, but I'm more anxious than you to find the murderer.

"I'll tell you more," he went on, his eyes flashing. "I've been doing some detective work myself. Doctor Thorensen was in the visitors' room when I went through the purse, and he was as keenly interested as I was. It was he, indeed, who suggested taking the money to make it look like robbery. . . . We didn't know that the twenty-dollar bill was in her hand and would give the lie to our plan. . . . If it's of interest to you—Doctor Thorensen was much upset about it all. Also, he was in the Club at the time of the murder. You can draw your own conclusions."

Jacoby waited for Muldrew to speak, but the Detective was silent.

"You may think I've done wrong all through," Jacoby continued, "but I thought it was all for the best. I hope you'll believe me when I say I was never so serious in my life as when I say no one wants to find the murderer of Jenny Luscombe as much as I do. If the police fail, I'm going to find him myself. I can afford to devote myself to it; I didn't need that job at the Wanderers' Club."

There were several questions Muldrew might have asked, but he forebore.

"You'll take me to this other apartment of the girl's?"

"Gladly. . . . No, I won't take you, I'll give

you the address. I don't wish to appear in it. But I'm afraid we're too late. I went around this morning and found the place deserted—cleaned out. The janitor knew nothing about it. It must have been cleaned out after I ran away last night.

"But there's another address that may interest you. I believe the blackmailers had an office in the Cosgrave Building—on the seventh floor—Number 736. Once when I was in the building I saw Jenny Luscombe get out of the elevator and go to that office. There was something furtive about it, and I went as near the door as I dare and listened. But all I heard was a man's voice—as if they were quarrelling."

Muldrew knew that office—he had pushed his way into it an hour ago. Jacoby was proving a mine of information.

"I'm grateful for all this," he said. "I've no objections whatever to your working on the case yourself. You may run across something I miss. It's a discouraging tangle so far."

Jacoby had scarcely more than closed the door when Inspector Armitage thrust his head through the doorway between the two offices.

"As usual, Muldrew," he scolded, "I have to listen in to learn how much you hide from me. Jacoby has told me more news in ten minutes than you've told me altogether."

Muldrew threw up his hands. "News? All Jacoby did in that chair just now was get the wires crossed, add a few knots to the tangle—and the hardest knot is himself. . . . I can only hope he hasn't tangled things as much as he thinks he has."

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER CONFESSION

THE two detectives sat for a long time reviewing the case, with Muldrew filling in some of the spaces for the Inspector. They were still deep in it when the telephone rang. Muldrew listened. As he hung up the receiver he smiled.

"We should have Jimmy Dolan with us," he said, "not against us, as he usually is. He's a better sower than he knows. Wendell Forrest wants to see me."

"When Jimmy Dolan," the Inspector returned bitterly, "has anything for the police I'm inclined to stand a long way off to see if it explodes."

Muldrew laughed. "Jimmy explains it—to his own satisfaction—as the expression of his concern for the Club's reputation."

"If he was more concerned for his own reputation we'd have an easier time cleaning up this city," the Inspector grunted. "Is Forrest coming here?"

"He wanted to—but a man talks more freely in familiar surroundings. I'm going to his office. . . . Jacoby knew what he was doing when he made his confessions here instead of at his own rooms. Let's hope confession is epidemic. We need a few more."

He passed out to the sunlit street. As yesterday he had forgotten to eat, and as he passed a stand the odour of cooking touched his appetite, and he entered for a sandwich. Munching thoughtfully before the counter,

his eyes fell involuntarily on a mirror on the opposite wall. In it he saw a man walk slowly along the sidewalk on the other side of the street and return. A third time he came into view, this time on the near walk, and as he passed he peered in.

Muldrew took his time. Three sandwiches vanished before he paid the bill and left the restaurant. Picking his way through the traffic, he reached the other side of the street and fell in at the side of a man almost as broad-shouldered as himself.

"Hello, Parsons! Who's paying for this?"

The man turned a tanned face on him and grinned. "You ask a mouthful, Muldrew. What's your guess? I'm not talking."

"It doesn't matter." Muldrew thrust his hand through the other's arm. "Come right along with me. It'll look better—and be simpler for you. We'll make a team of it instead of a tandem. I'm apt to get skittish when I'm followed. There's nothing secret about what I'm at—but I'm a little concerned about your flagrant secrecy. It was a dirty murder, and we're going to find who did it."

"It was dirty enough," Parsons agreed, "to make me wish you every success, and in a hurry—whatever it does to my job. You know I never help a murderer—or interfere with the police. That's all you need know—now or at any time. It should convince you that all I'm trying to do is to simplify the job I'm paid for by letting you do the work for me. It's easier money."

Muldrew squeezed his arm. "I believe you. If all detective agencies were as straight as yours we'd never worry about them. . . . Just now I'm on my way to the Cosgrave Building to see Wendell Forrest. He's a member of the Wanderers' Club, and he was in the building at the time of the murder. The

fact is, I'm talking to everyone who was there at that time. A mere convention, as you know."

"May I ask who were the others who were there?"

"Tut, tut, Parsons! Ask your employer that."

They reached the Cosgrave Building, and Muldrew stepped into an elevator.

"You may come right up, Parsons," he offered.

"Thanks. I never knew you to lie. I'll take a walk."

Arrived at the seventh floor, Muldrew wandered about the corridor for a time. Number 736 was no longer mysterious, except for the identity of its occupants. That was not pressing for the moment, and Muldrew felt certain that a raid at that time would find the office empty or, at the best, serve no purpose but to expose his suspicions. But he stood for a moment before the door, looking about. He realized the cunning of the blackmailers—with an office on the same floor as three of their victims: but as yet he could not definitely connect them with either murder.

He was ushered immediately into Forrest's inner office. Forrest was waiting for him, standing before the window, his hands locked at his back. He sighed and braced his shoulders as Muldrew entered.

"I'm glad you've come, Mr. Muldrew," he said, with the relief of one who faces the dentist and knows evasion is no longer possible. "I've wanted to talk to you ever since—ever since that sad affair at the Wanderers' Club."

He returned slowly to his desk and sank into the chair, where he toyed for a moment with a fountain pen.

"You'll probably laugh at me for making a mountain of a molehill, but I believe everyone associated with

—everyone who knows anything about the victim, however unimportant, should make a clean breast of it to the police. I've nothing of real value for you, but I'll feel better when I've been completely frank."

He shifted two wire letter-baskets and an inkwell, and as solemnly replaced them in their former positions. Muldrew said nothing.

"It's like this: I should have spoken before — yesterday, when I saw you in the reading-room, for instance, but at the time it seemed like—like pushing myself forward, taking your time. Some might think it was a desire to get into the limelight. You understand. I see it differently now. Of course," he went on hastily, "what I have to tell you has no bearing whatever on the—the tragedy; oh, none whatever, as you'll see." He wiped his hands on a large handkerchief, and, realizing too late what he was doing, thrust the handkerchief nervously in his pocket.

"You're quite right, Mr. Forrest," Muldrew encouraged. "Everything should be told, however unimportant it may seem. It doesn't waste my time. . . . I may tell you that you're not alone in deciding —after a delay—to tell things that might better have been told at the first. Several of your Club friends have given me information that promises to assist in fitting together the pieces of the puzzle." He leaned his elbows on the desk and said in a confidential tone: "They too knew Jenny Luscombe."

Forrest's eyes widened. "There were—others—at the Club?"

"A number of them. They too were blackmailed."

Forrest dropped back in his chair and frankly mopped his forehead. "Did they—tell you—what she blackmailed them about?"

"No, and I don't care to know. Jenny Luscombe

was a blackmailer, a professional blackmailer. That's all that matters."

"Thank God!" Forrest murmured. "Then I can tell you everything—everything." He heaved a heavy sigh. "Jenny Luscombe had blackmailed me for three months. You see why I couldn't face telling you before. I was afraid it might look as if—as if ——" He stopped, pleading with his eyes.

Muldrew nodded. "I might have done the same myself, Mr. Forrest—I might have been afraid to speak in the first excitement of the crime. And on second thoughts I'd have done the same as you're doing now—tell everything. But the fact remains that it's this secrecy, this concealment of essential and unessential facts, that creates suspicion of innocent men. If we all had more sense, if we thought more quickly, crime would be more dangerous than it is—and scarcer. . . . That is true especially in blackmail. Blackmailers wax fat on the silence of their victims, they dare to carry on their profession through their faith in that silence, and through nothing else. Now, what is it you have to tell?"

"What I say is strictly private?" Forrest pleaded.

"Only so far as it *can* be private. What is not necessary to convict the murderer will get no farther than the police."

"There was—a woman in the case," Forrest began. "Just for a short time, but it was long enough for someone to get to know about it. Jenny Luscombe knew of it. . . . You see—you see, I have a jealous wife, and she—I can't get along without her. I'm being perfectly frank—it's my wife's money keeps things going. The other woman is gone now—I broke it off months ago. I assure you, Mr. Muldrew, I haven't seen her for ——"

"Never mind that; it's immaterial."

The sympathy in the Detective's voice brought a flush to Forrest's cheeks. He looked down on his fumbling hands.

"No, that's not right. I'm *trying* to break it off. I'd give my left hand if I'd never seen her. All she wanted of me was money—I know that now. It's all they all want—her sort. I was easy. She too was a sort of blackmailer—yet I don't think she had anything to do with Jenny Luscombe; I'm quite sure she hadn't. . . . Still, there's this: night before last—that's the night before the tragedy at the Club—I was called down here by telephone—by this other woman. She said she wanted money—had to have it—and she'd meet me here. I felt I had to come. She didn't keep the appointment. I was glad of it, so I put some money in an envelope and sent it to her address."

He scowled at the fountain pen he held in his restless hands.

"That's the funny part of it: somehow Jenny Luscombe knew of it—right away. I don't see how the letter could have reached Ca—the woman, I mean, before ——"

"Where did you post the letter?" Muldrew asked.

"I dropped it in the chute in the hall?"

"At what hour?"

"It must have been close to nine o'clock, or a little later."

Muldrew smiled. "When did you learn that the murdered girl knew of it?"

"About ten the next morning she telephoned me here."

The Detective nodded understandingly.

"It clears up a mystery that has bothered us, Mr. Forrest. You posted that letter in the chute in the corridor at nine o'clock the night before last. Well, since there is no mail collection downstairs before

half-past eight the next morning, the letter could not have been delivered at its destination before the eleven o'clock delivery. Yet Jenny Luscombe attempted to blackmail you about it before that hour. Early yesterday morning it was discovered that a piece of glass had been cut from the letter-chute on the floor below. Someone knew you were writing that letter and broke the glass to intercept it as you posted it. It's the cleverest game of blackmail I've come across—a double game, for it wasn't the woman who telephoned you, but the blackmailers. You bit."

Such a wave of fury surged into Forrest's face that Muldrew studied him with altered interest.

"How did you come to meet Miss Luscombe?" he asked.

"She walked into this office one day, cool as brass, and demanded money. My first thought was to hand her over to the police, but she had anticipated that. She warned me that if I attempted to do anything like that the whole affair with this other woman would be revealed to my wife by her accomplices. I knew she told the truth or she wouldn't dare have been so bold. . . . I paid. . . . I've paid three times since.

"But," he went on anxiously, "that doesn't mean I could—I could do—anything violent. I couldn't, I couldn't—not like what happened to her. And now there are others in it," he added cunningly, "and they've probably more cause than I to hate her."

"You were in the Club when she was murdered, Mr. Forrest," Muldrew reminded him. The man's swiftly-moving emotions of fear, and frankness, and cunning, and self-defence annoyed him. "Just where were you in the building at the moment of the murder?"

"Why—why, in the reading-room, of course, where you saw me."

"Why 'of course'? As a matter of fact, no one

except Jacoby knows to within twenty minutes the exact time of the murder. I asked you that question, Mr. Forrest, because ——"

Forrest's face was white. "I mean, I was in the ——"

"Don't repeat it—that you were in the reading-room," Muldrew interrupted impatiently. "I happen to know you weren't. I know you weren't there even when the body was found."

"But how—how could anyone—know that?"

"Because someone looked for you. It was Jacoby. Why? Because it was not Doctor Blaney the girl asked for, but you!"

A distinct shiver ran through Forrest's body, and his hands shook.

"I—didn't know—that. Jacoby never told me."

"Jacoby had a reason. Never mind what it was, or why he lied to me at first. He too has developed a conscience, like so many others of you. Did you make an appointment to meet her at the Club, to pay her money? I want the truth, or it will be the worse for you."

"I did not—I never arranged to meet her anywhere." He threw back his shoulders. "I told her to go to hell. I saw there was no use trying any longer to buy her silence. I told her I was going to put the whole affair before the police ——"

"You threatened her?"

Forrest shrank before it. "No—oh, no, I didn't threaten. I just said—I'd tell the police."

"Then why did she wish to see you at the Club?"

"Maybe to try to settle, to keep me quiet. I think I frightened her—and perhaps she came to smooth things over. She knew I went there every morning I could get away at that hour. She seemed to know everything about me."

"So that you know nothing of the twenty-dollar bill we found clutched in her hand. . . . Oh, no, Mr. Forrest, your story doesn't hold together. You start out by telling me how necessary it was to keep everything from your wife, and you end your story in an entirely different vein. You're ready to defy blackmail—after the girl is dead. Someone paid Jenny Luscombe twenty dollars just before murdering her—and in his excitement forgot to recover it. Was it you?"

"No—no!" Forrest screamed, and sank his head in his arms on the desk. "I knew—I shouldn't—tell you," he sobbed. "It was Jimmy Dolan said I should —and you put him up to it. Jimmy said we should tell everything—everything." He lifted his head and glared at the Detective. "Dolan is a rat, a police spy. The dirty skunk—right there in the Club!"

Muldrew rose and stood over him. "Cut that out, Forrest. Jimmy Dolan never did anything knowingly in his life to help the police. If he advised you to tell everything, it's one of the few things that stand to his credit with the police."

But Forrest was not listening. Another thought had become fixed in his mind. He peered cunningly at Muldrew.

"Why did Jimmy do it? Can't you guess—you, a detective? Because he was there himself at the Club when the murder was committed. He wanted the rest of us to fall under your suspicion, while he escaped. Jimmy is clever—you know how clever he is. Yes, Jimmy was there himself! Ha! I'll have something to say to him when we meet next."

Muldrew listened as he ran on.

"Your suspicions add nothing to what I know already, Mr. Forrest," he said. "Don't think they influence me. The one thing that stands out is that

the murderer had to be there to commit the crime—and several members of the Wanderers' Club who were there had reason to get the girl out of the way. You were there—and had reason. By the time you've all told all the truth—I have to wring it from you all, as I had to do with you—I'll know more about it than I do now. In the meantime, don't leave town. Don't try it. I'm interested in all of you."

CHAPTER XXIII

ANXIOUS INQUIRIES

"SOMEONE'S been trying to get you the last ten minutes," the desk sergeant announced as Muldrew entered the police station. "Wouldn't leave no name. Here's the number." He tore a slip from a pad and passed it over.

Muldrew did not recognize the number. From his own office he called, and a woman replied.

"Is that Mr. Muldrew? One moment, please. The Doctor will speak to you."

Muldrew winked at the wall. "Doctor? Which doctor—Blaney or Thorensen?"

He had not long to wait. A cultured voice reached him from the other end.

"This is Doctor Blaney speaking, Mr. Muldrew. I wanted to ask if you've found any clue to the murderer."

Muldrew stifled a sigh of resignation. "I always give the same answer to that, Doctor. There never was a murder that left no clue. The rest is our problem."

"A problem you seldom fail to solve, if reports are true," said Blaney suavely.

"That sounds too pleasant to be argued, Doctor. I only hope your faith in the police is justified by the results in this case." He paused for a moment. "Is your faith strong enough to go beyond words?"

There was a perceptible pause at the other end this time. "I'm afraid I don't catch your meaning." The tone was less suave.

"There's a private detective on my heels, Doctor. When this happens the only deduction to draw is that his employer has limited confidence in the regular police. Private detectives are expensive. . . . They are also at a tremendous disadvantage, Doctor. They're never on the ground at the time of a crime—and that's where the clues are found. Also, they have no authority to pry about and ask questions."

Doctor Blaney laughed. "If you're as clever elsewhere as you show you are now, Mr. Muldrew, the murderer of that girl won't be long at large. I'm not certain if you disapprove of my private detective. It was a simple and natural thing to do, as I see it, seeing that my name was so closely associated with the crime. I did it for my own personal satisfaction, and for my reputation. People talk with little foundation."

"One might think the reputation of Doctor Blaney proof against suspicion," Muldrew said.

"Suspicion? I said nothing of suspicion," Blaney retorted acidly. "I see no reason, however, why I shouldn't do my best to assist the police to clear up the nasty affair. If Parsons can help you he's at your disposal. . . . I may say my wife is ill, and I wish this awful affair to be cleared up before she gets well enough to hear the gossip that may be going round. If I've done wrong I'm sorry, but I still think I acted as any man in my place would. I can well afford the expense. As a matter of fact, it was Jimmy Dolan advised it, and Jimmy ought to know."

"All right, Doctor. It's your affair. You may engage an army of private detectives, so long as they don't mess things up for the police. I'll say this for Parsons—you couldn't have a better man."

Blaney laughed uncertainly. "I'm glad to hear you say so. I didn't tell you what I was doing; I

didn't think it necessary. Parsons himself considered his chances better if you didn't know."

"Wise boy, Parsons," Muldrew said. "All he thought he had to do was to trail me around. I don't mind. When I want to throw him off—if ever—I think I can. But if you're so anxious to find the murderer, of course you'll see that Parsons tells us anything he discovers."

"Certainly. And if you can help Parsons ——"

"One moment, Doctor. Parsons is your man, not ours. The police don't happen to need a private detective. When we do we'll pay for him."

Muldrew hung up, sat for several minutes thinking, and then went in to Inspector Armitage.

"Business is rushing, sir," he announced. "I'm the most sought after detective in history—and by such important men. First thing I know I'll be put up at the Wanderers' Club. The murderer of Jenny Luscombe hasn't a chance, with all this talent on his heels. There's Parsons, and Tiger Lillie, and Jacoby, and Jimmy Dolan, and Shipman. I trot along behind, but, since I'm official, they all want to chum up with me."

The Inspector scowled. "What the devil are you driving at? What has Parsons to do with it?"

Muldrew told him. "It's an expression, sir, of the general distrust of the police—in the minds of the suspects in the case. We've a lot to do. . . . But several men have been working for me while I slept. I'm rubbing my hands."

CHAPTER XXIV

A CONNECTING DOOR

At four o'clock Muldrew strolled into the Wanderers' Club and rang the visitors' bell. The new clerk, Jacoby's successor, came hurrying in. At sight of Muldrew he stopped and stiffened.

"Could I see Mr. Shipman?" Muldrew inquired.

The man bowed and turned to leave the room. "I'm not sure he's in," he muttered. "In fact, I think he left the Club some time ago.

Muldrew strode toward him. "*Tell—Mr. Shipman—I wish to see him!* I'm in a hurry."

"Yes, sir." The commissionaire bowed and backed out.

It was so long before anyone appeared that Muldrew was about to go through to the lobby, but as he opened the door Shipman sailed in. He was in a vile temper.

"Now what do you want?" he snapped.

"I thought," Muldrew said amiably, "you might wish to see me."

For several seconds they eyed each other, Muldrew with an inscrutable smile on his lips, Shipman growing more and more uneasy. A flush appeared on the Secretary's thin cheeks.

"There's no reason—why I should," he stammered. "There's really nothing I have to say, nothing important, I mean."

Muldrew crossed the room to the door leading from

the visitors' room to Shipman's office. He slid the bolt and turned to face the Secretary.

"We might reach your office by this door, Shipman —if you'll unlock it."

"Um—yes—of course." The colour had left his face. "Yes—yes—of course. Yes, I'll unlock it. We *can* get through that way, can't we? Let's see, I wonder if I have the key."

He drew a key-purse from his pocket and began fumbling with the contents. Muldrew waited. After a great fuss Shipman tried a key. It would not work. Muldrew stood by, smiling; and Shipman, looking up, saw that smile and ceased his fumbling.

As they passed through Muldrew's attention was directed to the floor. Dust had gathered at the sides of the narrow space, but in the centre it was uneven.

Shipman closed the door softly, mysteriously, and dropped into his own swivel-chair behind his desk. Muldrew wandered about the room, apparently absorbed in his own reflections. But he was aware that every move was watched by the Secretary. At last Shipman could stand the silence no longer. He laughed, in an embarrassed way.

"Yes—yes, that door *does* connect the two rooms, doesn't it?"

Muldrew whirled on him. "Don't be a fool, Shipman. At least, don't consider me one. You've used that door often enough—and recently. Don't lie about it. I'm sick of the slinky ways of some of the members of this Club, and the sooner you know it the better for everyone—except the murderer of that girl in the room there. You've been using that door right along. You kept it unbolted on the other side until after the murder yesterday. Why? Then you bolted it. Why? Never mind the answer. I know it already."

The lump in Shipman's throat moved up and down.

"I—I locked it; of course I did. I couldn't bear to sit here and—and think of that—body there—as it was yesterday. It seemed to be there still—always. It was like a ghost. That's why I locked the door—like a frightened child."

"Sort of haunted you, didn't it?" Muldrew said.

"Yes, that's it—haunted me. Can you wonder?"

"I don't," Muldrew snapped.

Shipman's eyes grew wide with a slowly-dawning terror. He tried to laugh. "It was childish, of course. Do you know, I'm still frightened in the dark, and the sight of a spider makes me want to shriek."

"Yes," Muldrew agreed. "I knew a man who fainted when he cut his thumb. We hanged him later for cutting up the body of a woman he had stabbed and stuffing it in a trunk. He faced the gallows with a smile."

Shipman tried to appear interested, but his face was white, and the smile on it was a distressing mask. Muldrew drew a chair close to him and sat down.

"Shipman," he said, "I want you to talk. You've used that door recently. What have you to tell me?"

The Secretary's lips opened in a gush of words:

"I've wanted to talk, but I was frightened. I want to make a clean breast of it, to tell everything—everything." (Muldrew could hear Jimmy Dolan's voice driving those very words into them not many hours ago.) "You're right: I did use that door. I kept it unbolted so I could come and go without anyone in the Club intercepting me. It was more convenient. Sometimes I don't want to be stopped—I don't wish to talk to anyone, or I've work to do. By way of that door I can get through to the front hall."

"And," Muldrew added, "no one would see you, would they? . . . It was someone who did that who murdered Jenny Luscombe!"

Shipman lifted his shaking hands before his face. "My God, Mr. Muldrew, you don't think I—I did it?"

"You do your best," Muldrew said brusquely, "to make me think so. In fact, half a dozen of you have acted like fools all through . . . but *your* case is the worst. Why don't you come clean, Shipman? You knew that girl. You had reason to hate her, for she blackmailed you."

For a moment Shipman stared, then with a quick movement he dragged open a drawer and reached inside. But Muldrew was on him like a cat.

"Steady, Shipman, steady." He wrenched the automatic from his shaking hand and thrust it in his own pocket. "Don't be *fatally* foolish."

Shipman had collapsed whimpering into his chair.

"I shouldn't have said a word," he moaned, "I knew I shouldn't. I should have known it would tell against me. But—but I thought Dolan would know best, a big criminal lawyer like he is. He told us ——"

Muldrew had seated himself on the corner of the desk; there might be other guns within reach.

"You told nothing you could keep hidden, Shipman. I know what Jimmy told you. I know what several of you thought—and you had reason to think it. The only trouble is you tried to straddle the fence, all of you—to get away with half-truths. I had to drag the whole truth from you all by being brutal. Your consciences are too feeble to make you think of anything but your own skins—and I don't care a tinker's cuss for your skins—unless you're innocent. You were foolish to think to hide essential facts from me; you know I never give up. . . . Suppose you'd shot yourself. What good would that have done—anyone?"

"You've got enough on me now," Shipman wailed, "to send me to the gallows. I can't prove where I

was at the time of the murder—and there's that door. You said yourself ——"

"I haven't said yet that you're the murderer. That girl treated half a dozen members of this Club as she treated you. A blackmailer could find no more profitable field than the Wanderers' Club. You've got the money, the social standing, and the sort of pride that's too uncertain of its own reputation to take chances. I want to ask you a question, Shipman. When Jimmy Dolan gave you this good advice this morning who was present besides you and Forrest and Lansing?"

Shipman thought for a moment. "There was Doctor Blaney and Thorensen."

"Ah—Thorensen! . . . And now," lifting the Secretary to his feet, "we'll move along."

Shipman leaned heavily on the desk. "You're—arresting me! My God!"

"When I arrest you I'll tell you." Muldrew looked about the room. "By the way, have you anything of Jacoby's here—did he happen to leave anything behind him when he went? Have you any letters—any writing of his?"

"No—o, I'm quite sure I haven't. He never had any reason to write, and there'd be nothing else of his in this office."

"All right. We'll leave through the visitors' room. And don't look as if you know anyone seeing us together will think I've arrested you. Try to *look* like a man, at least."

Shipman started for the lobby. "I must tell someone—Ketcham, the new commissionaire—the new man at the desk—that I'm going."

"I suggest that you do nothing, Shipman, to force me to arrest you."

They passed through the visitors' room, Shipman

shrinking perceptibly from the chair in which the murdered girl had been found. Out on the street he kept wiping his lips. His face was white as chalk.

Muldrew was divided between pity and contempt.

"Yesterday," he said, "under more trying conditions, you carried it off better—with a lot of infuriating bravado that perhaps makes it harder for you to-day. . . . By the way, when I spoke of the little gathering in the reading-room this morning, did I mention Jimmy Dolan? Jimmy gave you advice for which he usually charges exorbitant fees. The Club should make up a collection for him."

CHAPTER XXV

A PLOT

WHEN Muldrew and Shipman reached the police station Tiger Lillie was closeted with Inspector Armitage. At sight of the Secretary Tiger's eyes bulged.

Muldrew, more than a little disturbed at the encounter, led Shipman through to his own office and beckoned to the Inspector.

"If you hang about this door to listen," the Inspector threatened, scowling at Tiger, "you'll get nothing more from us—except a warm pair of pants."

Tiger was scandalized. "Why—Inspector!"

But he did listen, though he remained where the Inspector had left him. He heard their voices but nothing more, and after fifteen minutes had passed he commenced to walk about the room, hoping to catch a word or two as he passed the door.

Muldrew interrupted his pacing by opening the door and calling him in. The Inspector and Shipman had gone, and Tiger made no effort to conceal his disappointment.

"It might have been better," he grumbled, "but, gee, it's news, Gordy. I say, though, aren't you taking big chances picking Shipman up like that? He's some nuts in this city—and with the Wanderers' Club behind him ——"

"It's nothing for you to worry about, at any rate, Tiger."

"I'm worrying about you. To arrest a man like Shipman, unless you caught him in the act ——"

"I've caught him—in some acts, but it happens that I haven't arrested him."

"Yeah, I know that stuff: you just brought him to the station for questioning—or his own protection."

Muldrew chuckled. "You don't know what a genius you are, Tiger."

"Talk about genius—how's this for a head-line in to-morrow's paper: 'Secretary of Wanderers' Club Arrested for Murder. Another Plutocrat Gone Wrong. Where is the Depression Leading?' Sounds big, eh? We might even get out a late night special now."

"You'd get more than that, Tiger, if you did—a suit for libel that would kick you out of your job and milk *The Star* of a few thousands. And you needn't look for sympathy from me. The word 'arrest' was never applied to Shipman—and I see no reason why it should be."

Tiger winked. "No. I believe the modern way is just to say, 'Come along, guy. The hoosegow for you!' The modern idiom is so much more expressive. Is Shipman still here at the station?"

"Ask Inspector Armitage. I've nothing to do with him now."

"All right, I'll just say in the paper that Inspector Armitage has the Secretary of the Wanderers' Club at the police station. We'll see how much that fools the public."

"It won't fool anyone," Muldrew declared, "because unless you promise to say nothing about this till I give you the word you don't leave this building to-night."

"Aw, Gordy!"

Muldrew only shrugged.

"I always contend," Tiger sighed, "that our police

methods need revising. If I had my way —— Oh, well, mum's the word. But take it from me, big boy, when this thing gets out I'm going to make it so warm for the police you'll wish you hadn't tried your rough stuff on Tiger Lillie."

"It won't get out, Tiger—because to-morrow there'll be such hot stuff for *The Star* that all this will look and taste like dish-water. You won't even have room for the police—except to applaud."

Tiger's eyes flashed. "You'll let me in on it Gordy?"

"I'm inviting you in."

The Detective picked up a letter that lay open on the desk and tossed it across to Tiger, who read it with pursed lips.

"Say, is this what you want—or is it bunk? Calls Thorensen the murderer, does he?" Tiger set the letter down with a thud. "Now all you have to do is to trace the writer of that letter, and you have in him the murderer of Jenny Luscombe. Thorensen! Bunk!"

"I'd be a fool if I thought it as simple as that," Muldrew said. "The fault of the amateur detective is his precipitancy. Even if you're right, the man who wrote that letter is confident he'll never be traced. But what do you think of this?"

He took an envelope from his pocket and placed it beside the one on the table.

Tiger bent over them. "Say, this last one is addressed to Jacoby! . . . And I'm swiggered," excitedly, "if it isn't the same handwriting!"

"I thought so myself."

"But where does Jacoby figure? Has he been threatened too? The murderer must be afraid Jacoby has information for you. That's what did for poor Bill Draycott." He struck his forehead. "Say, I'm a

duffer. For half the day I've been trying to convince myself Jacoby's the murderer. I thought last night at one time that you thought so. Now I'm up a tree, Gordy. Spring something clarifying. Oh, the trials and disappointments of the crime reporter!"

Muldrew thrust the letter and extra envelope in a drawer and locked it.

"I'm sorry to add to your disappointments, Tiger, but that envelope of Jacoby's came from another threatening letter—and in the last thirty hours I've been no better than a common thief on two occasions. We'd call it kleptomania in the police. It shows how hard pressed I am."

He told of Jacoby's visit and how he, Muldrew, had managed to palm one of the envelopes from the blackmail letters Jacoby had shown him.

"The whole case is one of blackmail, Tiger."

"Did Jacoby say so?"

"Yes, and he told you much the same last night."

Tiger looked relieved. "It was the deuce to keep from you what he did tell me, Gordy. But I don't see where it's going to help—much."

"It joins up some hitherto unconnected links," Muldrew explained. "It tightens the chase and gives me something definite to work on."

Tiger tilted his head cunningly. "Perhaps I can give you some more to work on—if that's what you're craving for. To-day I've spent a lot of time about the Cosgrave Building, and Peepin' Tom discovered that Jimmy Dolan and our friend Lansing are the closest of buddies. They were closeted together in Dolan's room for a long time. And Lansing left by the back door. It opens on the back stairs, and I'd got round there to listen. They almost tumbled over me when Lansing came out; I just got around the corner in time. Lansing seems to be in some distress.

"As he was leaving, Dolan said something like this: "There's not a thing more to do, Harry. Best thing is to wait and let things take their course. Anyway, you're safe from one trouble. Let me handle the other. If he gets inquisitive I think I can turn him off—though he's made me lose my temper a couple of times already. I don't think you need worry.' It ran something like that."

Muldrew smiled contentedly. "Thanks, Tiger. The links are fitting together."

"But what does this letter mean—where does it help . . . unless you think Thorensen's the man you want?" Tiger puzzled.

"That," said Muldrew, "is where you come in. Listen."

They moved their chairs nearer.

CHAPTER XXVI

ATTEMPTED MURDER

TIGER'S experience in the Cosgrave Building convinced Muldrew that another talk with Dolan might not be unproductive, and in his usual brisk way he set out to test his conviction.

As he walked along he examined the links of the chain that was slowly being forged. The background of the crime was evident enough. With sufficient motive for a foundation a sound structure should be possible, one that would withstand the assaults of lawyers like Jimmy Dolan. The very location of the crime would have much weight with establishing the motive in the minds of any jury.

But the next link was missing. Jacoby kept intruding into the case—and Jacoby was a puzzle. Was he to be trusted—at any time? He admitted more than one lie, more than one deception, more than one vital reticence; and each instance had done nothing but make the detective's work more difficult. Besides, Jacoby was a born actor. About him hung a mystery not relieved by anything that had happened before or after the murder, to Muldrew's knowledge. At times he seemed almost overwhelmed with fury, at other times he was cool and calculating. His bursts of frankness, that seemed so promising at first, led nowhere except to conclusions Muldrew was unwilling to accept. And always the Detective was conscious of a latent cunning that never quite forgot itself.

It was curious, too, that a Club clerk should be considered worth blackmailing, when the Club itself offered so much more profitable and prolific a field. And the members of that Club had pages in their history, almost without exception, that would attract the blackmailer.

It was strange, too, that so far as he had been able to discover the victims of Jenny Luscombe's plots were confined to the Wanderers' Club.

Muldrew asked himself if he really was nearer the solution of the crime. There was still so much to do to make his suspicions and conclusions worth presenting to the Inspector. With men of the social standing of the members of the Wanderers' Club he must move warily. . . . And yet—and yet, the very standing of those men made it advisable to solve the mystery with despatch.

He edged to the outside of the side-walk to make way for four schoolgirls approaching arm in arm, selfishly clearing the way before them.

As he did so a cry of warning came from the midst of the traffic on the roadway. It was followed immediately by a shriek that sent the blood pounding in Muldrew's veins.

It was late afternoon, and in the thin dusk the traffic was almost at its thickest. But it was not too dark for Muldrew to see, etched as on a white sheet, what happened.

A car tore from the line of traffic just as two men crossed the roadway. One of them, tall, broad-shouldered, nattily dressed, leaped backward with the agility of a tiger. Doctor Thorensen! Muldrew recognized him instantly.

His companion, smaller, stouter, walking slightly ahead, twisted at Thorensen's cry of warning, then plunged forward out of the direct path of the oncoming

car. The movement, too swift to be other than automatic, the prompt agility of a highly-strung man, would have saved him, but the car swung toward him, catching him lightly on the hip and throwing him to the pavement.

Muldrew saw it all. Attempted murder that missed only by an inch! Then he was dashing through the traffic, blowing his whistle. For the car had flashed away. The light at the corner was against it, but it squeezed through because the cross-traffic pulled up in time to prevent a crash.

A policeman came running to the whistle, saw the racing car, and commandeered another. But the traffic blocked him.

Muldrew ground his teeth. Then, like a flash, the licence number of the retreating murder-car registered.

Doctor Thorensen had rushed to the aid of his fallen companion and lifted him to his feet, and Muldrew saw it was Doctor Blaney.

Blaney was in bad shape. He was not seriously injured—Muldrew knew that—but the narrowness of his escape had made him a nervous wreck. His face worked pitifully, and low, uncontrollable groans broke from his white lips, while he clung to Thorensen like a helpless child. Muldrew stepped up to them.

"Is he hurt?" he asked.

Thorensen turned his head that his companion might not see, and winked.

"Take me—somewhere—quick," Blaney pleaded. "I'm all in."

They hurried him across the street to a jewellery store and entered. At a word from Muldrew they were shown into a small rear room, where Blaney broke down completely and sobbed.

Thorensen kept his arms about him. "All right, Blaney, all right now." Muldrew drew aside, watching

the scene in silence. Here was one of the city's best-known surgeons, a man who toyed with death and injury a dozen times a day—and now in hysterics from nothing but fright!

Thorensen looked round at him. "He'll be himself in a minute or two," he formed with his lips. "Six major operations to-day—it's too much to fit him for an experience like that—enough to break anyone's nerve."

Blaney stiffened. "I'm a fool, Thorensen, I know it. But—but did you see? He *tried* to run me down—he tried to kill me. Mr. Muldrew, Mr. Muldrew, you aren't going to let the devil escape, are you?"

Across Muldrew's mind flashed the licence number, and unconsciously he shuddered.

"We'll do our best," he promised.

Something in his tone, uncertainty, hesitation, caught Blaney's attention.

"What are the police for," he screamed, "if they can't punish a man for that?"

"If only someone had caught the licence number!" Thorensen grieved. "We were all too concerned about you, Blaney."

"But," wailed the broken man, "something must be done about it. I'll be afraid to cross the street—or go out alone. It was murder, it was ——"

He was working up another attack of hysterics, and Thorensen motioned Muldrew to leave them alone. As the Detective turned away Thorensen came to his side.

"If you wouldn't mind waiting outside, Mr. Muldrew," he whispered, "I'd like to have a word with you. I'll get Blaney off home in a taxi as soon as I can."

With a smile on his lips Muldrew left the store. But he kept the door in sight as he walked up and down outside. After a time a taxi drove up, the two doctors

emerged, and Blaney, throwing a frightened look about, dashed across the side-walk and slammed the door behind him.

"Ah, Muldrew!" Doctor Thorensen came to the Detective. "Let's walk along. My way or yours—it doesn't matter."

They set off together, two large, powerful men, such a pair as seldom decorate a street. Teaming, or tugging against each other? Muldrew wondered as they wound their way through the crowded street. He said nothing.

"What I wanted to say," Thorensen began, when they had left the thickest of the crowd behind, "may not be of the slightest value—it may not even interest you. But, after thinking it over, I decided that it was silly to conceal anything. *You* may go farther and consider it almost criminal. At any rate, it's only fair to you to make a clean breast of everything—everything. (How these tardy consciences parroted Dolan's words!) I see now that to hide anything connected in the remotest way with the victim of that ugly crime at the Wanderers' Club yesterday would be a mistake."

He lifted his broad shoulders, as if already he felt better. And Muldrew blessed the Fate that had brought him on the scene to witness the near tragedy that had so greatly upset two men in whom he was interested. But for that Thorensen's confession might never have been made. The nerve-racking experience of the murder-car had tipped the balance.

"Quite right, Doctor, quite right. It speaks well for several of your friends that they too have, on reflection, come to the same conclusion."

Thorensen turned eagerly toward him. "They have, have they? Friends of mine? Do you mean members of the Wanderers' Club?"

"Your story will be kept between us, Doctor, as far as possible. I treat everyone alike. . . . The value of the stories I have heard is that, unimportant as they may seem to the narrators, they have enabled me to piece together an almost complete picture. I know that the girl was rather widely known—in certain quarters. Little of this reached me when it should have. Of course, some of those who saw her dead body may not have recognized her in the fleeting glance they had."

"I have no such excuse," Thorensen admitted.

"I haven't concerned myself with an excuse for you, Doctor. Don't let that hamper your story. . . . I may tell you that we've discovered that the girl was a blackmailer."

Thorensen whistled. "That makes things clearer. So she's a blackmailer—been blackmailing some of my fellow-members of the Wanderers' Club!"

"I don't discuss with others, as I said before, the stories that are told me," Muldrew returned crisply.

"I stand rebuked." Thorensen smiled. "But their stories have helped you—and that's fortunate. Mine may not be so valuable. Of course, what I have to con—to tell has nothing to do with blackmail. All I had to say is that I had seen the girl before. She had been to my office two or three times."

"As a patient?" Muldrew asked. "Perhaps as a charity patient." He waited for the answer with some anxiety.

Thorensen regarded him in a puzzled, irritated way. "No. Why should you think that? Did she look as if she needed charity? I needed a nurse, that's all, and I advertised. That girl applied. There's nothing more."

"But you said she was in your office two or three times."

Thorensen cleared his throat. "Yes—yes. She wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. She seemed to be hopeful, to think I might change my mind. I suppose she counted on her good looks."

"You didn't change your mind?"

"Certainly not. I don't—often."

"Did she claim to have had experience? I know enough of her history to assure you she had never nursed."

"No, she admitted she had no experience—but I fancy she thought her appearance would carry her farther than experience. I definitely turned her down."

"Then she didn't attempt to blackmail you?"

"Why—no. Of course not." Thorensen's eyes were innocently wide. "How could she blackmail me—what for?"

Muldrew seemed to brood over it. "That's strange," he murmured, "seeing that your name was on the list we found among her effects—that and several letters."

Thorensen increased his pace, as if to escape the burr of inquisitiveness to which he had thoughtlessly attached himself.

"Doctor," Muldrew said, in a confidential tone, "your first thoughts were best. When you plan to tell all you'd better carry it through. It can't help but tell against you when I know you're concealing something. . . . It makes it so much worse when you definitely—lie to me."

Thorensen's large face blazed with anger, but only for a moment. Then his great body relaxed, and a moment later he heaved a sigh.

"You're right, Muldrew, I've been foolish. I've—lied. That was not the last of Jenny Luscombe. She attempted to blackmail me ——"

"She blackmailed you," Muldrew corrected relentlessly, "and you paid."

"Yes, I paid, but not because the thing she charged me with ——"

"Never mind that. I'm not interested. The only thing that matters is that she blackmailed you—and you paid."

"I fail to see the significance—of my paying," Thorensen said, his eyes straight ahead. "I have a reputation to sustain, and nothing is so easily damaged as a doctor's reputation. I paid—once only. That—was months ago. I'd forgotten all about her—almost—till I saw her dead yesterday in the visitors' room at the Club. . . . It was because I paid that I held my tongue when you asked about her there."

"And," Muldrew said to himself, as he watched the striking figure swing away from him into a side street, "you're still lying, Doctor Thorensen."

CHAPTER XXVII

OFFICIAL BURGLARY

MULDREW made directly for the Cosgrave Building. Doctor Blaney's narrow escape, the scene that followed, and the talk with Doctor Thorensen had broken into his programme. He had been delayed so long that he had little hope of finding Jimmy Dolan in his office.

As he expected, Dolan's office was closed. Muldrew hurried to the Wanderers' Club, only to find that Dolan had not been there since morning. Nor was he at home when Muldrew telephoned.

The next ten minutes was a time of crowding discomfort to the Detective. Never before had he felt so uncertain of himself. Never had he fluttered so swiftly from decision to decision, only to settle on none. Two courses presented themselves—and to choose the wrong one might well mean defeat all along the line.

Wandering into a quiet café, he took his seat in a corner and ordered a meal. For a time he lost himself in his reflections. A tempting piece of lemon pie had just been placed before him when some dim instinct impelled him to glance at the wall-clock. Then he was on his feet, making for the door.

"Pay you to-morrow, Hennessey," he called to the proprietor, and dashed away. Hailing a taxi, he climbed in.

* * * * * *

Tiger Lillie braced himself, threw a frightened glance over his shoulder into the dark shrubbery, and climbed the four steps to the verandah.

"Gosh," he chided himself, "you'd think I was staging a hold-up. But why anyone wants to live in a dismal hole like this—when I'm paying him a call—a nice, friendly call—— Oh, this reporter's life—and Gordy's friend!"

After some trouble he found the electric button, but when he pressed it not a sound returned from within the house. Three attacks on the button were equally unresponsive. Tiger looked the door over—the dark windows on either side—even the verandah roof.

"I've got to get in there if I have to bust in," he growled. "And that wouldn't do much good—unless," brightening, "I could get ahead of Gordy. Say," grinning into the dark, "that's not such a punk idea either."

However, he rang again, and a moment later he fancied he discerned in the dimness the flutter of a curtain at one of the side windows. It encouraged him to hold his finger to the button.

Suddenly the door swung open. He had heard no sound, and now before him stood a stoop-shouldered old woman in the full blaze of a hall light that had as suddenly been turned on. The woman peered at him, her hand still on the knob, blocking the doorway.

"Hey," she scolded, "you make a devil of a lot of noise!"

"I'm sorry," Tiger apologized, "but I thought no one was in."

"Then what was the use of making such a din, young man? Now, what do you want?"

"Is Mr. Jacoby in?"

"Mr. Jacoby?" She might never have heard of him.

"Yes, Mr. Jacoby. I know he has rooms here."

"You know ——"

Someone moved out from the dusk at the end of the hall. "All right, Mrs. Carnaby, it's all right. Hello, Lillie!"

"Good night, Jacoby."

They shook hands. Jacoby looked pleased at the visit.

"I'm damned glad to see you, Lillie! I had some uncomfortable hours about you after we parted last night. Come right in here."

He led across the hall to a comfortable sitting-room, and with the grace of a host welcoming a favoured guest directed Tiger to a large easy-chair.

"I was really alarmed about you," Jacoby was saying. "I had an unhappy experience myself. Someone knocked me on the head. After I'd got over the excitement of it I feared you might have fared the same. Someone was prepared for us, that was evident."

"It's a wonder you didn't call the police," Tiger began. "But you couldn't do that, could you?"

Jacoby lifted his feet to a second chair and settled himself for a long talk. "I thought I couldn't at that time. Now I'm sorry I didn't."

"Has anything happened—about that?" Tiger inquired.

"Not in the way you mean. But I've just discovered what a decent, reasonable fellow that detective friend of yours is. I blurted out the whole story to him to-day, about the blackmail and all."

Tiger twisted his head nervously toward a door that opened from the side of the room. "Is it wise," he whispered, "to talk of these things with the doors open?"

"Oh, that's only my bedroom," Jacoby said. "But

it *does* open out to the back of the hall." He got up and closed the door. "If you'd feel more comfortable. Anyway, the police know all about it now, so there's nothing to hide."

"Do they know how the girl was able to blackmail you? I was thinking of the old woman. She looks as if she'd like nothing better than to do a bit of blackmailing herself."

"She's not such a bad scout," Jacoby said, and chuckled.

"Does Muldrew know what Miss Luscombe blackmailed you about?" Tiger asked.

"He didn't want to know. I should say he's the goods, Muldrew is. He didn't press me about the men at the Club either—and I could tell him a thing or two about those fellows." He winked. "Yes, sir—a thing or two that would swing them into the picture. But I couldn't bring myself to talk about that. They fired me, I know, but I was a servant of the Club when I learned these things. And yet it troubles me. I can't decide whether it's my duty to tell all I know about them—the members, I mean—or to keep quiet, even though some things I could tell might be useful to the police. It's hard, too, to hold your tongue when you know so much."

Tiger shifted his chair an inch or two nearer.

"That brings me to the reason why I came to see you to-night. I'm looking for some fresh dope on the murder. *The Star* has to keep the thing alive till the murderer is found. There's always a tendency in the minds of the public to lose interest unless it's stirred by fresh incidents or side-lights. For the moment I've run up against a blank wall. This other murder last night had them on their toes this afternoon. I want to connect the two crimes more intimately in their minds. That's my job—keeping them goose-fleshy

with mystery and excitement. They're looking for a thrill, and I've got to find it for them.

"Also, I believe, with you, that the more publicity these murders get the more likely we are to find the murderer. Jerry Inkerley—he's our City Editor—Jerry wants something tingling for to-morrow—he's ordered it; and I'm the goat. I've got to make good or get out. I had to promise something special."

Jacoby listened attentively, a slow smile growing on his lips. Tiger talked excitedly, over-loudly. "What can I do about it?"

"You? What can—you do—about it?" Tiger was stammering—and Tiger's tongue flowed so freely under almost any condition. He shifted his chair noisily. "What can you do about it?" he repeated. "Say, you got a big story, Jacoby, a rattling thriller. You don't need to say a word about the blackmailing, but what we want from you, what we're willing to pay well for, is a statement of all that happened yesterday at the Club, as far as you know it. You saw the girl first and talked to her. You found her dead body. You were there with the body for a long time with Doctor Thorensen before the police arrived. Why, you got the only story that's left. Then, at the end, I can hint at the blackmailing—not of you, of course, but in general. It would bring down the house. It's just the sort of thing the public would lick its lips over—blackmail, among the members of the wealthy Wanderers' Club, a rift in the buffoonery of the Plutocrats' Circus! Don't you see it?"

His voice rose at the end. From the bedroom beyond the closed door a slight sound had reached him. Jacoby's eyes glistened.

"You say you'll pay for it. I don't mind admitting that I wouldn't mind a little extra money. I've lost my job, and jobs aren't plentiful these days."

"We'll give fifty dollars for it," Tiger offered.

"Make it a hundred."

Tiger cleared his throat noisily. "All right, a hundred."

"Done! Now, what do you want? I'll give you the story. You ask the questions."

"But I haven't time just now to get it that way," Tiger objected. "What would be better would be for you to write it out for me. Take your time, but do it to-night, sure. I'll call for it early in the morning—say, at nine o'clock. Never mind putting it in shape; I'll fix it up so we can use it. All I want is to be able to quote verbatim now and then. You've a sense of drama: I'm sure we'll be able to use much of it exactly as you put it. Make it a couple of thousand words, if you like."

"You may be disappointed," Jacoby ventured.

"That's our risk. All you need do ——"

From the bedroom came a loud crash. Jacoby was on his feet with a bound. But Tiger was before him and, being nearer the door, they collided in their rush toward the bedroom. Jacoby went hurtling over a chair, while Tiger bumped into the wall and fell across the doorway. With an oath Jacoby tried to leap over him just as Tiger rose to his knees, and for another few seconds the room was in confusion. Then Tiger himself threw the door open. Jacoby brushed him aside; a gun was in his hand.

But the bedroom was empty, an open window at the rear showing the way the intruder had gone.

Jacoby turned angrily on Tiger. "I'd have had him if ——"

"I'm so sorry." Tiger was red with humiliation. "I guess I was on edge—thinking of the murder and the scoop *The Star* is going to have to-morrow, and all that. I've been jumpy ever since I came. The dark

house, and that creepy old woman, and the time it took her to open the door—I've felt all along that something was bound to happen. I didn't think of burglars. Have they taken anything?"

Jacoby was moving about the room. The source of the noise they had heard was evident enough—a drawer upset on the floor. By other signs it was plain the room had been thoroughly ransacked.

"I can't tell you yet," Jacoby growled.

"But—but," Tiger puzzled, "while we were sitting within a few feet of him, talking! Did he do all this?" He pointed to the disorder in the room.

"You can gamble I don't keep a room like this." Jacoby swore viciously. "But I think he had his trouble for nothing. I'm not ass enough to keep valuables in a room on the ground floor." He cursed again under his breath, crestfallen as well as angry. "He took a risk. God, I wish I'd got in here in time!"

"Hadn't you better call up the police?" Tiger suggested.

"What good would that do? I can't see that anything is missing, and we haven't any idea who it was. Anyway, I haven't much faith in the police." He wandered about the room, peering into drawers.

Tiger sighed. "I guess you're right. It would only mean a lot of vague officials wandering about, prying into things, asking fool-questions, and getting nowhere. I'm like you—I like to do things for myself. You and I together may get somewhere in this murder affair—if I can get that story of yours. Gosh, won't the police be sore!"

"I'll give you the story," Jacoby promised, "if I have to stay up all night to write it."

Tiger closed himself out on the dark verandah and ran along the walk to the street. In the darkness a grin broadened on his young face. Two blocks away,

in a dark spot, Muldrew leaned against a gate-post. Tiger made straight for him.

"Say, that was a close shave, Gordy. Did you get anything?"

Muldrew shook his head disconsolately. "I'm a rotten burglar. Jacoby is too smart for me. How'd you come out?"

Tiger chuckled. "You read to-morrow's *Star*. You thought I was working your game, Gordy, but it wasn't all yours, not by a long sight. *The Star* is going to have head-lines to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TELEPHONE INTERVENES

They parted at the corner of the street that led to Tiger's boarding-house. Both had been silent most of the way home, Tiger elated over the prospects of the story Jacoby was to give him, Muldrew gloomy and plainly worried.

The failure of a plot on which he had counted so much upset the Detective. Besides, the night was getting along, and there remained so much to do. Jimmy Dolan had to be faced before another dawn. And Dolan was no man to meet unprepared. Muldrew had hoped for something to happen that would fit him for the talk he must have with the lawyer, some ray of extra light or the boldness born of success. So much depended on that talk. So much that was incredible had been thrust into the scene by the events of the afternoon.

Muldrew was not satisfied with the outcome of his two interviews with Dolan since the murder. Honours had been about even, but that was only less depressing than unqualified defeat. He had upset the wily lawyer's cynical self-confidence on both occasions, but that success had robbed him of information he had hoped to obtain—and might have obtained, he felt, with more care. The one satisfaction he had was that Dolan would writhe with the memory of those two lapses of his from the confident, teasing manner that

was his ever-present effective weapon, and, whatever happened, his safest refuge.

He had failed before through carelessness, but Muldrew knew that this time he dare not fail. And yet he could not envisage the scene before him. Without a moment's notice he would have to suit his course to the occasion. A dangerous way, that, to tackle Jimmy Dolan. It promised little of the information only Dolan could give ; it seemed hopeless to expect that Dolan would convict himself with his own lips.

Convict himself ? Muldrew frowned. What if Dolan did convict himself ? The pieces still did not fit—they fitted less at that moment than at any time since the crime.

Muldrew found himself unlocking his own door. He looked at his watch. There was no great hurry, and he seated himself in the big, worn chair before the open window. He did not turn on the light. In that chair, staring out at the starry night, he had spent many restful, dreamy moments. Out beyond the window the night was always dark, save for the rosy tint of reflected lights above the house-tops. Only the murmur of distant traffic reached him, whispering reminder of the world whose sharp and ugly edges were his daily contact.

How long he had been there he did not know, when the ringing of the telephone broke in on his reverie. He hurried to answer it, startled to see by the clock on his dresser that he had been dreaming so long.

A strange voice at the other end :

" Is that Mr. Muldrew ? "

Muldrew's number was not in the telephone book, and was used only by the police and his intimate friends. Something in the voice, some intonation or

peculiarity, touched a familiar chord in the Detective's memory ; yet he knew the voice was disguised.

"May I take a message for him?" he asked, disguising his own voice.

"No. Please—please, I must speak to him." The voice dropped to a whisper. "Tell him it's about Jenny Luscombe."

"I'm Muldrew," he replied instantly. "Who's speaking?"

The telephone clicked and was dead. Muldrew hung up the receiver, then took it down again and called the operator.

"Who was that called this number up?" he demanded. Already he was looking about for his hat.

"Sorry, sir, but I can't tell you that."

"Listen, my girl. This is Gordon Muldrew, of the police. Get that number for me. I'll be right down."

Seizing his hat, he ran out. At the corner he tumbled into a taxi. "Hillcrest Telephone Exchange," he ordered, "and never mind the traffic lights."

The taxi whirled away. Once they dashed perilously through a red light, and a police whistle sounded behind them. At the exchange Muldrew was put in touch with the operator. The call had come from a public booth in the hall of the Cosgrave Building.

"And someone's been trying to get you at the police station, sir, someone in a hurry."

"Get me the station at once." Muldrew stepped into a booth.

Sergeant Coddling yawned through from the other end. "It was Maple 2843. He's called up half a dozen times. Seems a bit excited. I told him I'd try to find you."

Muldrew dialled the number.

Three minutes later he dashed into the street. No taxi was in sight, and he ran to Markham Street. Still

no taxi, and he set off at a fast pace to walk. A policeman blocked his way but recognized him. Muldrew broke into a run. A taxi passed, going in the wrong direction, and Muldrew kept on running, wondering what had come over his heart that it beat so hard, for he kept himself in perfect physical condition.

He entered the Cosgrave Building just as the door to an elevator started to close. At his demand it waited for him. Alighting on the seventh floor, he paused to take breath. The hall was deserted, but the quiet of the place seemed to ridicule his excitement. Through the ground glass of the outer door he saw that Forrest's office was lighted.

He knocked. There was no response. Two thundering repetitions went unanswered. Muldrew returned to the elevator shaft and rang.

"Have you a key for the offices?" he asked of the elevator man.

"No, sir. Only the janitor has them."

"Then get the janitor. Tell him to bring his keys. Rush it — and don't stop for anything else either way."

While he waited he put his eye to the keyhole, but nothing was to be seen except the end of a counter. He paced the hall, feverishly impatient. Not another door showed a light, and from the office beside Lansing's, that Jacoby had named as a resort of the blackmailers, emanated an aura of desertion.

The click of the returning elevator sent him back into the main hall. A man in shirt sleeves stepped out, bubbling with importance. Muldrew caught him by the shoulder and rushed him to Forrest's door.

"I'm Muldrew, of the police. Open that door, and quick about it."

The hands of the janitor trembled as he selected

a key. The outer office was empty. Muldrew ran on.

In the inner office, with the light still on, lying across the desk, was the dead body of Wendell Forrest. From his side a stream of sluggish crimson spread over the blotter.

CHAPTER XXIX

NOT SUICIDE

THE body was still warm, but the borders of the stream of blood wriggling over the blotter had begun to coagulate.

Muldrew drew the janitor into the corridor and raced along to 736.

"Open it," he ordered.

But 736 was out of the picture. It was empty. So was the single cheap desk that, with two equally cheap chairs, made up the furnishings of an office never intended for business. Muldrew was not surprised.

Lansing's office was dark, and though Muldrew looked in, there was no evidence that anyone had been there since the regular closing hour. The Detective called up Inspector Armitage and the police station and returned to Forrest's offices. He went over the room hastily. He liked to be alone for the first examination, and here more than usual. Several vital incidents connected with the case on which he was engaged he had hidden from his superior, and the time was not yet ripe for being frank. Yet he knew he could not conceal much longer what he knew.

Beneath the edge of the desk lay a small automatic, where it might have fallen from Forrest's nerveless fingers, but Muldrew scarcely glanced at it. From an open drawer dangled a key-purse, and this he lifted as it hung and left where it was. After a glance into the open drawer he waved the janitor into the outer office.

A pile of letters lay in the drawer, and three of the upper ones he removed, glanced over them, and thrust them into his pocket. Going out to the janitor, he asked :

" How many elevators are running to-night ? "

" Two. At this hour we don't need that many."

" Send here to me each of the elevator men in turn."

The janitor went, and in a short time the attendant who had brought Muldrew up appeared.

" You've been on duty for the last half hour ? "

The man was badly frightened. " I've been on since seven, sir."

" Who went down with you in the last half hour ? "

The attendant's brows knit. " Nobody. At least, I don't remember nobody, not in the last half hour—not from this floor."

Muldrew saw that the man was in no condition to be trusted. " All right, my man. All I want of you is a little information. Take your time and think back. In the last half hour you'll remember everyone you carried down ; there can't have been many at this time of the night."

" I'm sure there wasn't any from this floor, sir. I remember now—two from the third, clerks in the insurance office, and four or five from the fifth. That's all."

" Did you bring Mr. Forrest up ? "

" Yes, sir ; it must have been more than half an hour ago."

" Bring anyone else to this floor ? "

" No, sir, I'm sure of that."

Muldrew gave it up. He knew the unreliability of the snatch evidence of men like this. Later the fellow might remember more. He realized, too, that anyone coming with murder in his mind would cover his tracks

too carefully to be exposed by the evidence of the frightened attendant. There were stairs, three flights of them, that could be reached from every corridor.

"That's all. Send me your mate."

The second operator was of different calibre. He entered with something of a swagger. Muldrew read a story bubbling on his lips. This man was prepared.

Yes, he had brought someone to the seventh floor —and he'd carried him down. But not from the seventh—from the fifth. The leer with which he spoke puzzled Muldrew.

"It was Mr. Dolan. He must have walked down the two flights."

Muldrew gave no sign that he was interested, and after a few desultory questions dismissed the man.

Inspector Armitage, three policemen, and Jasper, the finger-print expert, hurried in, and the latter set to work. The Inspector pointed to the gun.

"Suicide, eh? Finances—fright—or unrequited love?"

"None of them, sir . . . because it isn't suicide," Muldrew replied.

Inspector Armitage eyed him inquiringly. "Go on. You've had time to pry about."

"The only evidence of suicide, sir, is the gun. But I have two proofs that it was murder. Here's one." He released the key-purse that hung from the open drawer. "A man with a key-purse on a chain, that was evidently attached to him with a safety-pin, doesn't detach it when he wishes to use it. Someone else did that—after Forrest was murdered and the body lay as you see it.

"I've a better proof than that, and one the murderer cannot be aware of. Half an hour ago I talked with Forrest in this office over the telephone. He was

frightened into a panic. Someone had brought him down here by telephone and then not kept the appointment."

"We'll get that man here and ——"

"I don't know who it was. Forrest didn't know. Forrest was one of Jenny Luscombe's victims, and this was another move of the blackmailers. Forrest was in no position to refuse such a summons. But he had a similar summons the night before Jenny Luscombe was murdered, and certain disturbing events followed. On that occasion, too, the one who was to meet him did not appear. The repetition wore Forrest's nerve through. He telephoned me to come down right away; he was afraid to leave the office. He felt something terrible threatened . . . and so did I. I hurried down."

"Nerves, eh? Blackmailed?" Inspector Armitage frowned on the body. "Any ordinary jury, with a clever lawyer for the defence, would refuse to consider anything but suicide. Nerves—fright—suicide. A natural progression in the minds of that prize ass of the courts, a jury."

"But it was *dread* of death that put him in a panic, Inspector."

The Inspector shrugged and walked around the desk to get a better view of the dead man's face. "Why should he be in a panic in a locked office, with you on the way to rescue him? Is it conscience, Muldrew? Is he a murderer himself?"

"Perhaps that's what the murderer intended us to think, sir."

"Hm—m! So you think all this was planned?"

"I'm convinced of it. . . . But what I'm not convinced of is that it was planned to picture Forrest as the murderer of Jenny Luscombe. If that were so there'd be incriminating evidence left about. There

isn't. Still, all these crimes, the three of them, are connected in some way. As yet I'm not certain how."

"Then why was Forrest murdered?"

Muldrew shook his head. "I take the same stand here, sir, as I did when we found the body of poor little Bill Draycott. If the pressing idea is to find Forrest's murderer, I'd rather you'd put someone else on it. I'm still concentrating on the murder at the Club—and I'm not sure they're closely enough connected to prevent the risk of being led up an alley. But of this I'm confident—when we find the murderer of the girl, the other two will be simple enough."

Jasper had been examining the gun. Now he raised his head above the desk.

"They're Forrest's prints, all right, but ——" He shook his head querulously.

"What is it, Jasper?"

"It ain't natural—the prints, I mean. They're out of place for a man shooting himself—and all messed up."

"A man shooting himself is apt to be less careful of his prints than you might like," Inspector Armitage said dryly.

"A man shooting himself, sir," Jasper retorted, "ain't apt to muss 'em up purposely. He's got more important things in mind. Look at these."

Muldrew took the prints and examined them. Jasper elaborated with the gun and the dead man's hands. The result was more or less inconclusive.

"It really doesn't matter," Muldrew said when it was over.

"Doesn't matter?" the Inspector protested.

"Doesn't matter for the time being, sir, because I've got more important things to do to-night. Whether Forrest committed suicide or not will come out

in some other way within the next twenty-four hours, or I'm going into seclusion. This can wait."

"Secretive as usual," the Inspector grumbled. "You're never communicative when you're in doubt. And," grudgingly, "you're always in doubt till you have a man where he might as well confess."

Muldrew smiled. "I'm not telling everything just yet, sir, because I may want your unprejudiced opinion, your unprejudiced judgment. My own is sure to be coloured by the trail I've been following."

Inspector Armitage prowled about the desk. He looked into the drawer. "If it's not suicide, it's robbery. Why else would this drawer be open?"

Muldrew took the letters from his pocket and handed them over. "There's proof enough of the blackmail, at any rate."

The Inspector glanced over them. "How many were in this thing, anyway—that girl's victims, I mean?"

"You know some of them. Curiously enough, Jacoby says he was another. He had the letters to prove it, too."

"The handwriting on the envelope is different from that in the letters," the Inspector said. "A man has written the addresses. It was quite a stunt doing the addresses himself—the leader, I mean. It kept control in his own hands until he was ready to apply the screw."

"Here's something else, sir." From another pocket Muldrew drew the envelope he had kept from Jacoby's letters. "You'll notice something more there: the address on that envelope you have is not written by the same hand as this of Jacoby's. It doesn't seem reasonable that two men should be writing the addresses—if your explanation is correct."

"At any rate, it seems to prove there's a gang in it."

But Muldrew shook his head. His eye lit on the waste-paper basket, and he pounced on it and dumped its contents on the floor. Inspector Armitage stood beside him and watched as he scrabbled among the torn and crunched paper. After a time Muldrew lifted his head with an exclamation of triumph. In one hand he held a sheet of letter paper, and with the other he reached for the envelope the Inspector had.

"Clear as day!" he exclaimed, rising. "The murderer of Wendell Forrest was afraid to leave the envelopes of those blackmail letters for us to find. There's only this one, you notice."

"But I still don't see ——"

Muldrew was excited. "Those blackmail letters were planted in that drawer. No sane man, like Forrest, would leave them about, even in a locked drawer. He'd destroy them—or keep one at the most, in case he wanted it for tracing the writer. But he knew who wrote them—the letters, I mean, and that's all that matters. Jenny Luscombe was not afraid to meet her victims in person. Yes, they were planted there, and by someone who feared we might trace the writer of the addresses. That's why he removed an envelope from an ordinary business letter of Forrest and put it on one of the blackmail letters."

"In that case," said the Inspector, "we're supposed to think Forrest murdered Jenny Luscombe and then committed suicide. And the man who addressed those envelopes is the man we want. He's Forrest's murderer."

"Probably. You see, the murderer couldn't know that I knew before that Forrest was being blackmailed. . . . What is more important is that, since the murderer brought these letters with him, he had murder in his mind when he came. It wouldn't be safe to assume that merely from the telephone

appointment with Forrest. Forrest must have opened the door to him after he called me up. Certainly Forrest, in his nervous condition, would not admit a stranger." Muldrew had turned away. He feared that his superior might see behind his words—the thoughts that whirled in his head, disturbing, contradictory, perhaps foolish.

"There's more than that, sir," Muldrew went on. "The murderer of Wendell Forrest was a cool one. He took no chances. He even called me up to make sure I was safely out of the way." He told of the strange voice on the telephone, and the abrupt cutting-off.

"But how did he get your number, Muldrew?"

"That's another missing link, sir. I'm after that. Perhaps it was Sergeant Coddling gave it. I forgot to ask."

Inspector Armitage took a turn about the room. "Then if we're through here, let's go. You've talked to the elevator men, you say. There isn't much else to do, is there?"

"I think not, sir."

Muldrew was glad to get away. For two reasons: his night's work had only begun; and he never enjoyed too close association with his superior when he was deliberately concealing essential facts. Of Jimmy Dolan he had said nothing—this Jimmy Dolan who had been at the Club at the time of the murder, who had had the murdered girl in his employ, who had later been blackmailed by her, who had advised a clean breast from his fellow-members but refused to take the advice to himself; this Jimmy Dolan who had crowded into the picture so startlingly during the last few hours, that Muldrew fumed with his own uncertainty. Jimmy Dolan threatened to upset everything.

At any rate, from now on Jimmy Dolan must be handled without gloves.

His discomfort was not lessened by what the Inspector was saying :

" If this is murder, then, as you say, the murderer was well enough known to Forrest to be admitted. Forrest was seated at the desk when he was shot—or when he was threatened. He probably rose to his feet and fell across the desk as we see him now. The leader of the blackmail gang, of course. You don't think so, Muldrew ? "

Muldrew's brows were knit.

" From the condition Forrest was in I can't imagine him letting in ——— " Realizing that he was speaking his thoughts, he stopped. The Inspector filled it in in his own way :

" By God, that's right ! If Forrest was frightened, as you say, he wouldn't have let into his office the very man of whom he was frightened. He'd have kept him out at any cost till you came, particularly when you knew of the blackmailing already. Then we've got to look elsewhere for his murderer. Muldrew, do you see where it's leading ? It was a friend of Forrest's who killed him, *a friend !* Besides, there's no sign of a struggle. . . . But," he sighed, " there's another slant : the leader of the blackmailers may also be a previously unsuspected friend. Jenny Luscombe did all the contact work before, I suppose."

Muldrew made a show of being interested. He was —in a way unsuspected by his superior. Was Jimmy Dolan's part in the affair so flagrant that the Inspector, knowing as little as he did, struck the mark ?

" Wendell Forrest," Muldrew said, " was cursed with a suspicious wife. Add to that a man who could not keep himself above suspicion and you have a picture of the agony of his days."

But Inspector Armitage was not to be led away. "Is it possible, Muldrew, that we have to look among his friends for his murderer—among the members of the Wanderers' Club, for instance? Don't you see how that would link things up—Jenny Luscombe's murder and this?"

"What about Jenny's cousin, Bill Draycott?"

"They might be afraid that Jenny had told him something that would get to your ears."

"Then your idea, sir, is that Forrest's murderer is also Jenny Luscombe's. That the double murderer—the triple murderer—is a blackmailer in high places, that he murdered the girl to get a dangerous accomplice out of the way. That would imply that he had all the money he wanted or could get, or that he feared she was going to expose him. We have no proof of any of those conditions. And we almost agreed that the evidence planted here against Forrest, as the murderer of Jenny Luscombe, is so much less than it might be that we can ignore it."

Inspector Armitage listened, with his eyes on Muldrew's face.

"Humph! I see you don't agree. All right. I'm not trying to take the case out of your hands but only to help." He picked up the gun. "If we could trace this gun ——"

"You'll find it was Forrest's or it wouldn't be left to point to suicide. If you don't mind, I'm forgetting all this for the time being. Can we go now?"

"I'm going, anyway." The Inspector pursed his lips; he was almost peevish. "It's your case, Muldrew. It'll be your shame if you fail. I'd just like to draw your attention to the fact that the murderer had to get away from here somehow. . . . Three murders in two days! It's a bit steep. It's up to you to get busy."

They had almost reached the corridor. At that moment an elevator stopped and a man alighted. Muldrew strode to the door and looked out. The new-comer turned at the sound.

It was Jacoby.

CHAPTER XXX

TWO MURDERERS

THE three stood transfixed. Inspector Armitage's grey brows met in a straight line. Muldrew was plainly taken by surprise. Jacoby was as evidently embarrassed.

It was Muldrew spoke first. He contrived a note of friendliness in his tone.

"Hello, Jacoby!" He drew the door of Forrest's office behind him. "I didn't know you had an office here. But perhaps your interest in the case at the Club has set you up as a private detective."

He laughed, and Jacoby laughed with him. Muldrew was sorry the Inspector was there.

"Not quite," Jacoby said. "What sleuthing I do is even more private than that. I was here—to see a friend."

"Then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. I happen to know there isn't anyone on the floor but ourselves." He saw Jacoby's attention fixed on the lighted glass of the door of Forrest's office. "We've been in there—with Forrest."

Jacoby turned and glanced along the hall in the opposite direction. "It looks as if you're right. I had an appointment with Mr. Dolan."

"At this hour?" inquired the Inspector.

Jacoby took a heavy gold watch from his pocket. "Well, not exactly. I see I'm half an hour late—but I thought he'd wait. I couldn't get here any sooner."

"Perhaps," Muldrew laughed, "you're stealing a march on the others mixed up in the Jenny Luscombe murder by retaining Jimmy for your defence. The one we finally fasten on is sure to want Dolan to defend him."

They laughed together—even the Inspector, in his sudden way. Under his bushy brows he threw more than one questioning glance at his subordinate.

"It's my good fortune," Jacoby said, "that Dolan undertakes *other* business for me. So perhaps I'll have first call on his services. I don't have to use him much, thank Heaven, at his price, but I found him so reliable and sane once or twice before." He looked down the hall toward Dolan's offices. "I suppose I shouldn't have expected him to wait, but I couldn't help it. Oh, well!" Suddenly he frowned. "If that isn't the worst of luck! I have to leave town to-morrow, and I wanted this fixed up first."

"I don't think you'd better do that, Jacoby," Muldrew said: and the Inspector looked relieved. "We may want you at any moment. You see, you're our most valuable witness. We never know when we may run on something we'll need you for."

Jacoby came toward them, his face alight with excitement. "Do you expect—something? Have you found new clues?" He looked beyond them at the door Muldrew had closed.

"I think you may count on something interesting within twenty-four hours," Muldrew replied.

"You're more confident than you were last night," Jacoby said with a touch of scorn.

To the Inspector's scowl Muldrew contrived a look of embarrassment.

"Jacoby and I had a long talk last night, Inspector, and I'm afraid I showed too plainly how hopeless it

all looked." With the eye turned from Jacoby he winked.

"You should be more careful," the Inspector reproved. "There's always hope, I say—though it looked bad in this case, I admit."

"But that," Muldrew said, rubbing his hands, "was an hour ago. We feel different now. I wasn't just talking when I said within twenty-four hours something might happen. Maybe *The Morning Times* will surprise you."

From the first Jacoby's face had been a study. Evidently striving to mask his thoughts, there was, nevertheless, a slight play of emotion. At first a suggestion of a smile, then of interest that amounted to excitement, and now cold as a mask once more. But behind his reply was something that puzzled the two detectives.

"You're as confident as that?"

Muldrew's reply was to beckon him to follow. He opened the door at his back and stood aside for Jacoby to enter. The latter hesitated, looking from one to the other in a questioning way. Then he stepped into the office. There, after a curious glance about him, he followed Muldrew to the inner office.

When his eyes fell on the limp body of Wendell Forrest he started back with a stifled exclamation. Inspector Armitage was close behind him.

"What—what does this mean?" Jacoby whispered.

"It looks like suicide," Muldrew said, pointing to the gun. "Did you know Forrest—outside the Club, I mean? Ever see that gun?"

Jacoby shook his head. He seemed stunned to speechlessness. At last he found words.

"Forrest—too! No, I never knew him except at the Club. Poor man! What does it all mean?" His face lighted up. "I've often thought of late he

had something on his mind. He was moody and silent and bad-tempered. He'd changed of late, I thought. But—I didn't think—it would come to suicide."

"It hasn't," Muldrew said shortly. "It's murder!"

"Murder?" Jacoby closed his eyes for a moment. "Three of them!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Surely," Jacoby returned, with curling lip, "you can see the three crimes are connected! What a brute!"

"Make it plural," Muldrew said. "Because the one who killed Wendell Forrest did not kill Jenny Luscombe!"

CHAPTER XXXI

BRAVING A LION

NICKEL in hand, Muldrew entered a telephone booth. Irresolute, full of misgiving, yet pressed now for time, he dropped the nickel in the little circle in the top of the instrument and waited, but before the bell rang at the other end he hung up and for several moments stood leaning against the glass wall considering.

He wanted too badly to see Jimmy Dolan that night to announce his plan. If he did, Jimmy would be sure to be out, or at the best he would face the Detective well armed. And above all, Muldrew knew that his chance of success lay in catching the criminal lawyer off guard. He must, by hook or crook, break down the confident, bantering air that carried Dolan through every threatening entanglement.

Boarding a street-car, Muldrew alighted at the other end of the line. He had still half a dozen blocks to walk to Dolan's house, but he was glad of the interval for reflection.

The lawyer lived in a gargantuan house that stood back of a wide, thickly-treed lawn—but not so thickly-treed that the gaping passengers of sight-seeing cars were denied a satisfactory and flattering glimpse of it. Dolan made money easily, and no proof of it seemed to him so assertive as a showy house.

Muldrew peered into the hedge-enclosed flagstone walk with a twisted smile. Dolan might wish publicity for his house, but he had another wish for his visitors,

The necessary secrecy of his practice had transferred much of his more intimate business from his office to this suburban home.

A great hulk of a butler answered the Detective's ring, blocking the way with his big body.

Was Mr. Dolan in ?

The butler stood stiff as a ramrod. Who wished to see Mr. Dolan ?

"Tell him it's about—Jenny Luscombe," Muldrew said in a mysterious voice. "He'll understand."

In the size, in the grim manner of the butler, in the seclusion that hedged the place, Muldrew read several things. Of one thing he was convinced—the lawyer would not wish to see him at that place and at that hour. The password he had given would, at least, keep Dolan guessing.

The eyes of the butler assumed for a moment a less distant focus. Then, without word, he stepped back and closed the door.

Muldrew looked quickly about. On either side a window bulged, and in the one spot invisible from those windows he placed himself.

He had almost given up hope of being admitted when the door opened again—the slimmest of cracks.

"Mr. Dolan is not ——"

Muldrew threw himself against the door, almost knocking the butler from his feet, and walked into the most luxuriously furnished hall he had ever seen. From the rear of the hall two men-servants, almost as large as the butler, started toward him. Muldrew backed against the wall.

In the moment of his abrupt entrance he had seen the flutter of a heavy curtain on the right side of the hall.

"Come out, Dolan," he called. "And you, all of you, get back." He had a gun in his hand. The three servants backed away, unsteady and confused.

"If you don't come out, Dolan, I'll have to arrest you. Take your choice."

The curtain jerked back, almost torn from its fastenings, and Jimmy Dolan, his lip curling, stepped into the light of the hall. At a wave of his hand the three servants vanished.

"So dramatic, Muldrew!" he sneered. "So like the police—when you're up against it! Theatricals to drown your incompetence. You must have your little thrills. It's part of the system."

Muldrew slid his gun into his pocket. "You know more about our failures, Jimmy, that any other man in town. You're responsible for many of them. But this time I didn't fail, did I, in spite of your body-guard. And," looking significantly around on the magnificence of the furnishings, "at this moment you're more conscious of failure than at any other moment of your life—in spite of all this luxury. And that means something, when you're always so closely surrounded with the threat of failure that you find it necessary to employ three hulking bruisers to protect you. Perhaps you've discovered that wealth isn't everything. But I didn't come to moralize—you wouldn't understand me if I did. Where will we talk?"

"I have office hours ——" Dolan began stiffly.

"I haven't—and this time I decide for you too."

"I have nothing to talk to you about."

"You mean, you have nothing you *wish* to talk to me about. That too I'm in a position to decide. That's another choice I'm giving you—here or at the police station. We don't furnish box-springs at the station."

Dolan was restraining his fury with the greatest difficulty. "You'll learn you can't force your way into my house ——"

"I didn't force my way in. No one said I couldn't get in, and the door was open. I know my law. Oh, yes, you may order me out—but you'll come with me. Do we talk—and where?"

For a moment it looked as if Dolan would defy him, but Muldrew thought he knew his man. He was right, for the lawyer shrugged contemptuously.

"Now that you've had your little scene, Muldrew, it looks silly when I ask you to come right in and make yourself comfortable—if you can. It strikes me that you've spent a lot of time the last couple of days about me and the Cosgrave Building—and the fruitlessness of it must irritate."

"At any rate," Muldrew returned easily, "it costs me nothing to retain an elaborate spy-system. You just *have* to make a lot of money, don't you, Jimmy?"

Dolan scowled. "When it comes to dealing with the police, my friends and my office employees are my best spies, Muldrew. I know all about your talks with my stenographer. I hope you're satisfied with what you got out of her."

"Perfectly."

"I call it despicable," Dolan flamed. "And if you're satisfied—your satisfaction expressed itself in a peculiar way. All right, I know of nothing more to be desired than to be rid of you quickly. Come in here and get it over."

He led through the curtains and closed a double door behind them. He had recovered his composure by the time they were together in a small room at the end of a short hall. There he dropped into a low chair and waved Muldrew to another. With his slippered feet on a stool, he leaned back and folded his hands.

"Go ahead, policeman. And you might have a —— But I forgot: you don't smoke—except for a purpose.

You had one yesterday in my office—or you fancied you had. I noticed it. Perhaps you'll tell me what that purpose was."

Muldrew settled back. He had scarcely hoped for this, and he wondered if it prophesied success or failure.

"All in its proper order, Jimmy. There's so much to come before that."

"When I saw you first," Dolan said, striking a match, "I thought you might have come about my car that was stolen this afternoon. But I should have known such precipitancy would make the police dizzy. No, that's not quite right—my best card, the secret of my successes, is the precipitancy of the police. But let that pass. I don't wish to be nasty. I'm your host. Sorry you don't enjoy smoking."

Muldrew felt the ground slipping from under his feet. Dolan's car stolen! He had come so confidently, uplifted by the assurance that he had a bomb to hurl that would knock every atom of assurance from the man before him. Or he had depended on that as his one assured weapon. For it was Dolan's car that had so nearly taken the lives of two of the victims of Jenny Luscombe's blackmailing! That licence number he was never likely to forget—E28743.

Clever Jimmy Dolan!

"Your car was stolen, was it?" Muldrew murmured feebly. "At what time?"

Dolan puffed a long cone of smoke toward the ceiling. He sensed the Detective's mortification. "I can't tell you that, of course. All I know is it was gone when I left the office to-night."

"At what hour did you leave the office?" Muldrew's heart beat rapidly.

The lawyer must have sensed that, too, for his

eyes dropped to the other's face and twinkled through the haze of smoke.

"I've already reported to the police, but, if you wish to know—an hour or so ago, perhaps more. I left the car parked around the corner of Plymouth Street, after lunch. I didn't leave the office for dinner—too damned busy!"

Muldrew smiled. "Do you mean you were at your office at six to-night?"

"At six? . . . I believe I did run out for a snack."

"You were not in your office at six, for I was there."

"Does it matter?" Dolan lifted his eyes wearily. "I was out for a few minutes, but I didn't look for my car. When I left for the night—it must be a couple of hours ago—the car was gone; but at what hour it was stolen I can't tell, of course. I suppose it's too much to expect results from the police—except a wreck somewhere in a ditch miles away. . . . It was an expensive car, too."

"Yes, I remember. Its number was E28743."

Dolan's sleepy eyes widened. "You've a remarkable mind, you know, Muldrew—for some things. I never can remember the number myself. If it's worth talking about, how did you know it? No, wait. I remember: you saw it under suspicious circumstances in a blind street in the west end, night before last, didn't you?" He chortled. "And the moment that girl was murdered at the Club your swift intuition, that remarkable mind of yours, fastened the crime on me. Astounding process. . . . You asked me questions about that, didn't you? And I told you to go to hell. Rude—but I repeat it now."

"It was your right—at that time, Dolan." Muldrew's voice had a menacing note.

"My right at that time or any other."

"Think so? But if I have evidence to justify such an inquisition? Dolan, to-night I've brought that evidence."

The lawyer sat very still. He did not look at Muldrew, he did not smoke; and before either spoke again the spark at the end of his cigar went out. With deliberation he placed it in the tray, squeezing it down until the dead end spread untidily.

"And so," he said slowly, "you've brought—evidence!" He laughed abruptly. "Muldrew, I've had to face that sort of evidence too often in court to be upset. I think you'll admit it never did upset me. I'm not upset now. With all its mystery, with all its dramatic threat, I'm facing it without a quiver. See." He held out a fat hand that, in spite of him, trembled a little. He let it fall quickly. "I've defended hundreds of clients. Am I called on now to defend myself? All right, I'm a bear-cat at that. Let's hear what this evidence is."

He made a great show of confidence, sinking back in the big chair and closing his eyes.

"You admit," said Muldrew, "you were in your office at the Cosgrave Building up to half-past nine to-night?"

"I don't recall admitting anything. I said I was there up to about a couple of hours ago; I can't be certain to half an hour. Besides, admit is not the word—for anything."

"You can't be certain to half an hour? You daren't make it broader than that—because the exact time when you left is known to me ——"

Dolan jerked himself angrily upright. "Damn it! What do all these hints mean? Why have you been hounding me? What does it matter when I left the office?"

"And," Muldrew continued placidly, "you don't know when your car was stolen. You're indefinite about everything."

"Of course. How could I know these things? I told you ——"

"So far, so good. Perhaps now we can come out frankly and speak of those blackmail letters I found on your desk."

"You mean the letters you stole," Dolan corrected, with a nasty smile.

"Call it what you will. In that we're even. You had someone steal them back. But not before they told me what I wanted: you were blackmailed. And the blackmailer was Jenny Luscombe, the girl who was murdered in the visitors' room of the Wanderers' Club. You were there at the time."

Dolan looked like a thunder-cloud, and slowly his face lost its colour. Then he threw his head back and laughed. "As usual, you've got the stick by the wrong end, Muldrew. But I can't explain."

"You won't, you mean. I wouldn't imagine it so easy to corner Jimmy Dolan, the criminal lawyer, into taking refuge in all these refusals. *You daren't explain!*"

Dolan bounded to his feet. "Daren't? Wait a moment."

He left the room in long, hurried strides. Muldrew crept to the door after him. He heard Dolan cross the hall and open a door, and he peeped out. The lawyer was in the telephone-room off the hall, the door swinging in his trembling hand. The dial clicked, and the door closed.

Presently Dolan returned with a wide grin, rubbing his hands.

"Another failure, Muldrew, another mistake. You know, this is getting interesting. You thought, too,

I was trying to escape from you out there, when all I was trying to escape was a breach of confidence. I spoke a moment ago of the precipitancy of the police. Another example of it." He chuckled for several seconds.

"Go on, Jimmy. I don't feel like joining in the laugh—yet."

"You won't—ever. I've just been talking to Harry Lansing. He says you already know he was blackmailed. The letters you stole from my desk were his. He had given me them only that morning. He was tired paying, and he'd handed them to me, as his lawyer, to get the thing cleared up."

Once more Jimmy Dolan, clever, astute Jimmy, had beaten Muldrew. He regarded the Detective with an indulgent, teasing smile. "Such a succession of errors, of futile clues—it must be depressing ——"

He stopped, staring at a cigarette stub Muldrew had drawn from his pocket. The carmine of stained lips was more distinct then ever. Slowly a rosy flush came into the lawyer's face.

"What the hell ——!" he began. "What's all this? A cigarette stub, isn't it?"

Muldrew said nothing until he had placed beside the cigarette the stub of a cigar.

"I found them yesterday morning in the ash-tray in your office, Dolan. This is Lansing's, that is—Jenny Luscombe's. It was placed there within an hour of her murder."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LION TAMED

DOLAN leaned forward staring at the two bits of tobacco as if hypnotized. All his assurance was gone; but he braced himself against it.

"I still don't see ——" He stopped, convinced of the futility of professing ignorance of what Muldrew knew and so effectively proved. "I've no reason to deny that the girl was in my office. Why should I?"

"Because she must have gone almost directly from your office to the Club where she was murdered. Because it would be hard to convince a jury that you weren't aware of where she was going. Because you were in the Club when the crime was committed. Those letters may have been Lansing's, but did Jimmy Dolan, with all his susceptibility to blackmail, particularly by a girl who had once worked for him and learned the secrets of his office, a girl who can be proven to have sworn vengeance against him for dismissing her—did Jimmy Dolan escape blackmail from such a source? Would you swear she did not blackmail you? I have information, Dolan, much that I have not exposed. You admit now that she was in your office a short time before her murder ——"

"And you may as well know right now why she was there," Dolan blustered. "It will save a lot of misunderstanding — and unwarranted elation. As Lansing's lawyer I asked her to come. I was seeking an arrangement. Is that clear?"

"But you just told me Lansing gave you the letters only that morning."

"There—there are telephones, aren't there?"

"We can check up on a telephone message. How did you get in touch with Jenny Luscombe?"

"By telephone, of course."

"Where did you telephone?"

Dolan's lips twitched. Muldrew stared mercilessly into his face; and finally the lawyer, so successful in cornering others, admitted himself cornered.

"You believe so readily some things I say, Muldrew; others you discredit." His tone was petulant.

"You gave me a considered story. You gave me two that failed to agree. . . . Jimmy, an interesting scene took place this morning in the reading-room of the Wanderers' Club. You were the hero of it. You considered it so interesting that you informed me of it when I met you as you left. You had, you said, planted seed for me. How well you planted you cannot know. Since that time I've heard so much about Jenny Luscombe and her ways. . . . The point now is, why were you so eager to plant seed that induced others to confess? Did you think for a moment my attention would wander from yourself? Did you think I'd be so absorbed harvesting the crop that I'd forget the one you yourself had to offer? Your advice to those men was excellent. Why not take it yourself?"

Dolan lay back in his chair, panting a little, his fat hands tight over the heavy silk upholstery.

"Perhaps you're right, Muldrew," he said in a thick voice. "I should take my own advice. . . . There is something I can tell you, something I can confess. Yes, I too was blackmailed."

"So many have admitted it before you, Jimmy. They were wiser."

The lawyer scrambled to his feet and began to pace the room. "Hell! What's the use—with you? You drag it from a fellow—everything. The devil she was—she blackmailed me too. And I was helpless—perhaps more helpless than the rest. Never mind what she had on me; all of us have something to hide, as Forrest said this morning." He turned appealing eyes on Muldrew. "Don't you see the hell of it? Here I was trying to help Lansing when I was powerless to help myself.

"But," bending nearer, his eyes wide with sudden dread, "you don't think—you can't think I—I had anything to do with the murder?"

"Someone killed Jenny Luscombe," Muldrew said, "and, I fancy, someone with compunctions keen as your own."

"And there's the bell-boy!" Dolan whispered. "A double murder ——"

Muldrew stopped him. "Jimmy, did you have anything to do with the boy's dismissal?"

"I—I—what do you know about that?" Dolan asked, shrinking back.

"I'm asking—and not blindly."

"Well, you see how it was. Here was a lad related to the girl who blackmailed me and, I gathered, other members of the Club. I had wondered how our secrets got out, why we were picked on . . . and it struck me that the girl may have got them from her cousin. We do a lot of loose talking at the Club, and he might have heard—anything."

"Bill Draycott had nothing to do with it."

"How can you know that?"

"I'm not easily misled. Bill couldn't carry it off as he did if he'd been blabbing—if he knew anything about the blackmailing. . . . I'll tell you something more: the boy was murdered for fear I might find

him useful. As a matter of fact I had hopes of that very thing. But some brute got ahead of me—someone who, thinking of him as you do, thought it wise to get him out of the way."

"You mean the girl's murderer was afraid ——"

"I don't connect the two murders that closely. Never mind all my reasons. I'll give you one: a couple of hours ago there was a third murder—Wendell Forrest!"

Dolan crashed into a chair and stared blankly at Muldrew.

"You don't mean—Wendell—Forrest? Is that—why you're—here?"

"It is. Forrest was murdered in his office in the Cosgrave Building. You admit you left the building about two hours ago—we can fix the exact time, as a matter of fact. Forrest's office is on the same floor as yours, and no one else was on that floor all the evening."

Dolan's breath came thickly. His eyes were glassy with fear.

"You think I—I did that—too?"

"I'm keeping an open mind," Muldrew replied. "You were on the floor at the time of the murder, and no one else we can trace. How did you leave? I mean, how did you come away from your office to the street?"

"Why, I—I—by the elevator, of course. How else?" He jerked himself upright, his face more ghastly than ever. "I did use the elevator, but—but ——"

"I know. You walked down two flights of stairs first. Even the elevator-man wondered at that. Can you explain it?"

Perspiration had broken out on the lawyer's face. "I—don't—know. I was thinking—I was worried. Everything seemed to be going wrong. I knew you

suspected me, and I couldn't see how I could clear myself. I didn't know then for sure there were others except Lansing blackmailed by the girl—and blackmail was the cause of the murder. But now—now—you see, there *are* these others." He eyed Muldrew cunningly.

"Don't worry about them, Dolan. I'll look after them. It's your case we're considering now. I knew why you worked on the fears of the others, those friends of yours at the Club. Now, what were you doing so late at your office?"

Dolan had drooped forward, covering his face with his hands.

"My God, Muldrew, it's awful! But I can explain —I can explain. I stayed late to see a client."

"Who was the client? But you needn't answer. It was Jacoby."

Dolan lifted a haggard face. "How did you know? You're uncanny, Muldrew."

"Nothing uncanny about it. Jacoby came to keep the appointment while I was there after Forrest's murder. What is there between you and Jacoby?"

"Nothing—nothing whatever, except that I've done a little work for him. That's all. It's God's truth, Muldrew. But he didn't come, Jacoby didn't keep the appointment, though I waited several minutes. My God, how unfortunate! If he'd been there I'd have had a witness."

"Does it not strike you, Jimmy, that Jacoby was late—for a purpose?"

A light of understanding flashed in Dolan's eyes. "By God, that's it! Jacoby made the appointment to make sure I'd be there; then he —— It's a plant, Muldrew. Surely you see that!"

"I merely suggested it," Muldrew returned quietly. "Don't bank on that to clear you. Did you hear

anything like a pistol shot while you were there? Forrest was shot at close range."

"No—o. But I wouldn't be likely to notice it if I did. The walls are sound-proof, and any little noise I'd connect with the sounds on the street." He looked miserably about the room that had once been so restful, so much a part of his proud worldly possessions. "It sounds so—so useless, Muldrew. I've told the truth, so help me God! If you'll only believe me!"

Muldrew pitied him. This Jimmy Dolan, who had so openly laughed in the faces of the police, who had defied and baulked them, who had run a confident course through difficult years in a difficult profession, was a broken man.

"You say you were blackmailed," Muldrew said. "Have you any of the letters?"

Dolan had. He left the room and returned with four.

"I couldn't let you read them—not all of them," he stammered. "I could let you ——"

"All I want is the handwriting."

Dolan folded part of a letter back and showed it to the Detective. Muldrew asked for the envelopes.

"They're the same, letters and envelopes. I'm looking for the man who addressed those envelopes—later. I'll take one of these envelopes." He thrust one in his pocket. "Now about this car of yours. You say it was stolen from Plymouth Street some time between lunch and the time you left the office to-night."

Dolan waved it aside. "Let the car go. What does it matter—now, till this other thing is straightened out?"

"It matters a lot, Jimmy. Your car was used this afternoon to attempt the lives of two of your fellow-members of the Wanderers' Club—Doctor Thorensen and Doctor Blaney."

"I think," Dolan murmured weakly, "I can't stand much more to-night. I don't seem to be able to grasp it all. I don't know what it means—what anything means. I'm not even sure I'm hearing you rightly."

Muldrew told the story, while Dolan listened with parted lips and gaping eyes.

"Thorensen—and Blaney! But why—what have they to do with—anything? Where do they figure? You mean—they were blackmailed too? But if they were —— It looks as if the murderer of Jenny Luscombe is starting on the Club members."

"I have that in mind myself. And it promises to explain a lot that has puzzled me."

"I'll go staring mad if you don't find out soon, Muldrew," Dolan sighed.

"I'm finding out before to-morrow night," Muldrew promised.

The telephone rang, and a moment later the butler came to ask for Dolan. The lawyer went out. In a few seconds he was back.

"They've found the car," he announced dully. "The police have found the car. It was parked against the curb in the west end."

"Perhaps it returned of itself to that blind street beside the railway," Muldrew said dryly.

"You needn't go on misjudging that, Muldrew. I was there to meet Lansing's blackmailers. . . . No, I'll be honest: it was a fool paying blackmail—dark deeds in dark places. But you won't believe me. You may think I drove my car when it tried to kill Blaney and Thorensen, and then parked it out there and told the police it was stolen. And perhaps you're right—I don't know. I'm just plumb loco—woozy. I don't even know what I'm saying. . . . Maybe there's a Mr. Hyde in me."

Muldrew dropped in at the police station in passing.

"Sergeant," he asked, "why did you put someone on to my house telephone to-night—give them my number, I mean?"

"I didn't. What do you take me for?"

Muldrew departed, shaking his head. "Dolan isn't the only one plumb loco."

CHAPTER XXXIII

VITAL EVIDENCE

GORDON MULDREW did not sleep well that night. Late as was the hour when at last he crawled into bed, he felt that his day was incomplete ; events were moving too rapidly to be dropped even for sleep.

At eight in the morning he stood before the door of the Draycott apartment. A strange woman answered the bell.

" May I see Mrs. Draycott for a few moments ? " he asked, upset more than he cared to admit by the strange face peering through the narrow crack of the door.

A coldly appraising eye ran over him. " She isn't here."

" Would you be good enough to tell me where I might find her—as soon as possible ? " Why did there lift such a cold, unscalable wall before him at the moment when he hoped to cover the last neglected evidence before coming to grips with the solution he had in mind ?

" I haven't any idea where you could find her ? " was the uncompromising reply.

Muldrew inserted a foot in time to prevent the door closing in his face.

" My good woman, I don't know what you have in your mind, but I'm a detective. I'm working on the murder of Mrs. Draycott's niece—and of her son, and I must see her without delay."

" Why didn't you say so at first ? " The door was

flung open. "You come prowling about the place, just like someone prowled about it and slaughtered that poor boy. You ask questions. I didn't know what right you had—and I shouldn't maybe take your word now. After what's happened one can't be too careful. Anyway, I haven't anything to do with anything, so you've no right to come here frightening me."

It was not her fright but her garrulity that impressed Muldrew. He grew impatient.

"Now I want to know where to find Mrs. Draycott."

"She's where she was yesterday—and where she'll be till you police find her son's murderer. She's out on the streets looking for him herself. She says she'll be able to spot him a mile away—and I think she will. Martha Draycott is that kind of a woman. You police are so slow she's taken things in her own hands. Humph! It's nothing new for a woman to have to pitch in ——"

Muldrew sighed. "And what she'll accomplish is —less than nothing. She'll mess things up for the police. That's what they all do when they start going on private hunts. If she'd remained at home I'd have brought her son's murderer to her door—to-day. I didn't think it necessary to warn her that I might wish to talk to her at any time ——"

"Then you know who slaughtered Bill?" the woman asked, with the first sign of friendly eagerness.

"Yes. . . . I know the murderer. In a few minutes I hope to have the proof. Until then I daren't move. If you're a real friend of Mrs. Draycott the best you can do is to pray that she doesn't meet him on the street."

"She was out at seven this morning," the woman said. "I don't think she's slept scarcely since Bill was slaughtered."

The word she persisted in using made Muldrew creep. It pictured slit throats, or mechanical thuds on the head with an axe.

"I want to search the bedroom where Miss Draycott slept," he said. "I'll do that while I'm waiting."

As he examined the room he asked:

"Do you happen to have seen any writing of Miss Draycott's?"

The woman hadn't. In fact, she had seen Mrs. Draycott repacking all the drawers, "and there wasn't so much as a snitch of paper."

Muldrew's examination convinced him that the woman was probably right. But the identification of the handwriting on the blackmail letters would be a simple affair. He waited half an hour, growing more and more impatient.

At the first pay-telephone station he called up *The Star* office and asked for Tiger Lillie. There seemed to be some confusion at the other end before the reply came through that Tiger was not there. Tiger's boarding-house reported that he had gone out earlier than usual—must have been seven o'clock—and in such a rush he hadn't waited for breakfast. Muldrew cut short the complaints of Tiger's landlady and made for his own office.

There he called *The Star* again; and again the same confusion. Finally Jerry Inkerley replied. No, Tiger wasn't in—hadn't been in except for a few moments at half-past eight.

Had he handed in anything about the murder at the Wanderers' Club? After a delay Jerry replied that there was nothing on his desk about it.

Muldrew smiled and hung up, put on his hat, and made straight for *The Star* Office. Without stopping to announce himself at the "Enquiries" wicket he bounded up the stairs to the City room.

Tiger was seated on the edge of Inkerley's desk. Their heads were close together over a sheaf of copy that lay spread before them. They were unaware of Muldrew in the doorway, a smile on his lips.

"It's going to be a knock-out, Tiger," Jerry exclaimed exultantly. "With this other murder last night—and they're connected in some way, as you say, or we must make them appear to be—the street is going to have tingles up and down its spine when they read this. Muldrew will try to stop it from the later editions but it'll be too late then. We'll fight him on it." He clapped Tiger on the back. "Another scoop for you, boy. What made you think of it?"

"It was Gordy gave me the idea," Tiger replied, "but, gosh, he didn't know it. All he thought of was giving me an excuse for calling on Jacoby last night and keeping him busy while he did a stunt we had arranged; I can't tell you what it was. I never let on I was going to go after this stuff of Jacoby's seriously, but I saw right away what a bang it would be—the man who was on the spot and saw everything from the first. There we have it all in his own words—his own writing. I went to see him again about midnight. I just couldn't wait. Gee, won't Gordy be mad when he knows! He never likes ——"

A hand fell heavily on his shoulder and another reached over and swept up the copy. Without a word Muldrew turned his back on the discomfited pair and ran his eyes over the top page. Inkerley plunged forward, ready to fight for his rights. Tiger's face was red, and he looked as if no hole would be too small for him.

"Look here, Muldrew," Inkerley objected, "you can't do that. That stuff's private. You ——"

"It's so private, Inkerley," Muldrew replied, "that even *The Star* can't have it." He clapped the shrinking

reporter on the back. "Great work, Tiger! Now and then you put one over on the police—but this isn't the time." He read aloud the head-lines already written in by Inkerley's scrawly hand:

"'Inside Story of Club Murder.

"'Club Official Gives Exclusive Story to *Star*.

"'Details Hidden by Police at Last Made Public.'"

He gesticulated as he read, his voice throbbing dramatically.

"So this is Jacoby's own story—written by his own hand? Great work, indeed! And the star reporter of *The Star* did it out of his own little noodle! Played a trick on his old friend of the police." Muldrew grinned. "Tiger, my boy, you haven't the faintest idea how well you played—and how grateful I am for being let in on it, even at this late hour. I want this story."

He folded the copy. Inkerley stepped belligerently forward.

"No, you don't, Muldrew. That copy is my personal property, and you can't take it like that. It was obtained in the ordinary process of news-gathering, and it belongs to *The Star*. You can't walk in here—the police can't—and lift anything they want without formal authority; and you're not going to do it now. That story goes right away to the composing-room. You hear me? Keep it, and there'll be a row that'll make you crawl. There are some things *The Star* won't stand for, and you've found one of them."

Muldrew did not argue. He tossed the copy back on the desk.

"All right. Send it to the composing-room—pay your dollar and a half an hour to set it up—and by the time it appears on the street you'll kick yourself for wasting a lot of money and bally-rag that won't get past the first edition. Because it'll read as flat as spilled water."

They glowered uncertainly at him.

"I'm warning you," Muldrew went on imperturbably. "Publish that, and *The Gazette* will have a scoop that will run *The Star* off the street. . . . But if you prefer to wait for the big news ——"

He looked from one to the other. Inkerley was frankly alarmed, Tiger excited. From his pocket Muldrew took an envelope and tossed it beside the copy on the desk. Tiger bent over it.

"Cripes, Gordy, it's the same handwriting—the envelope and this—this of Jacoby's."

"It doesn't surprise me. I've been trying to get a sample of Jacoby's hand from the moment I suspected blackmail. The fact that the Club could show me nothing heightened my suspicions; Jacoby didn't wish his handwriting to be where the blackmailed members might recognize it."

"That was what you wanted in his room last night?" Tiger exclaimed.

"Yes—but I failed."

Tiger threw up his hands. "But you had another plan up your sleeve: I was to suggest this story of his —in his own writing. And I thought it was just to hold his attention while you made the raid! It was part of your little game!"

"You're a great little accomplice, anyway, Tiger."

"Then Jacoby is the leader of the blackmail gang!"

"Exactly. It was a small gang—only Jacoby and one other man, I believe, and they used Jenny Draycott as their medium. Blackmail is too dangerous a game to share. Jenny wrote the inside letters, but Jacoby kept control by addressing the envelopes. Until it came time to collect only he knew their victims. That was how he came to have blackmail letters of his own. It didn't deceive me."

"And he murdered the girl to get her out of the way!" Inkerley cried.

Tiger groaned. "What a sap I was! He sure took me in plenty. Have you got him?"

"I don't want him—at the moment." And as they crowded him with questions: "Am I right in taking it for granted that this story of Jacoby's won't get into print—to-day?"

"You can bet your last dollar it won't. But later ——"

"Just one question, Tiger, before I go," Muldrew said. "You saw Jacoby last night some time after ten. Did he mention Forrest's death?"

"He was full of it. Said he happened to walk in on you just after you found the body. Gave me colour for the screed I wrote about it; it's upstairs now. But, gosh, we'll have to kill that too, Jerry. We can't take dope from a fellow like that. It's probably bunk."

"On the contrary, it's probably correct to the last detail. Nobody could tell you more—and Jacoby wouldn't risk using his imagination at this time. He doesn't wish more attention from the police. By the way, did you at any time give him my private telephone number, Tiger?"

Tiger flushed. "Why—why, I believe I did. He wanted to get something to you—he was all excited about it."

"When did you do it?"

"The night we went for a walk. He said ——"

Muldrew's face lighted up. "That's fine. You had me fussed for a minute."

"Can't you let me in on things now, Gordy?" Tiger pleaded.

"No reason why not. Jacoby called me up last night at my room. It was before you saw him at midnight to get that story of his."

Tiger caught hold of the Detective's lapels. "Did Jacoby murder Forrest?"

"You're not a bad guesser, Tiger."

The reporter whooped jubilantly. "Jerry, Jerry, don't you see? When Muldrew nabs him—don't you see how big this story of his will go over—the murderer's own story! Oh, gee! I'm the goods this time, eh? And now, Gordy, I'm going along to be in at the kill. You can't keep me out of it."

But Muldrew shook his head. "There won't be a kill—not the one you think. I'm forgetting all about Jacoby. . . . I'm tackling a nasty job, and I want to face it alone. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

PAYING THE PENALTY

A CONFUSION of emotions surged through Muldrew as he struck across the city. Triumph was there, excitement; but with them mingled the inquietude of one uncertain of himself, the discomfort of a disagreeable task ahead.

In a district that until two years ago had been exclusively residential, with homes of the better class, he stopped for a moment before a large stone house that bore on its wall a small brass sign. Then, throwing back his shoulders, he walked rapidly up the flagged walk.

Two doors faced him; the one on the right, admitting to a recent addition, bore on it a second brass sign:—

OFFICE.

WALK IN.

He opened the door and walked in. A hall stretched away into the gloom on his left, ending in a door that was only vaguely visible. Straight across the hall from where he stood another door bore a sign inviting him to walk in.

In the waiting-room to which the door admitted two women were seated uncomfortably on the edges of their chairs, each with a neglected magazine in her hand, taken from a table in the centre of the room. Behind a small desk in the upper corner sat a white-capped, efficient-looking nurse. At Muldrew's entrance

she looked up with a cold, impersonal question in her face.

Muldrew went to her.

"Is Doctor Blaney in?"

The nurse continued to eye him frigidly. Without answering his query she dropped her eyes to an open appointment book before her.

"Have you an appointment?"

"Perhaps the Doctor will see me without an appointment," Muldrew suggested in his sweetest tone.

"What is the name, please?"

Muldrew lifted his face toward an electric clock over the nurse's head. It was a quarter to eleven. The sign on the wall outside had fixed the Doctor's office hours at twelve to one; yet two women were waiting for him.

"My name is Muldrew. If you think he'll be in soon I'll wait. I didn't know his office hours, but now that I'm here—I see he's expected."

The nurse hesitated. Muldrew was certain the expression on her chiselled face had altered momentarily as he gave his name.

"I'm not certain —— But it's probable he will be in, Mr. Muldrew." Her eyes had followed the Detective's to the two waiting women. "His office hours are twelve to one—it says so on the sign outside—but to-day he made an appointment for eleven. These ladies will be ahead of you. Doctor Blaney will wish to rest, I suppose. He has had a hard morning at the hospital."

"I think he'll see me," Muldrew replied confidently. "I'll wait."

As he looked about for a chair he felt the nurse's eyes on him.

"Yes," he agreed, as he sat down, "he *will* be weary

after a morning of operations. Does he usually rest between eleven and twelve ? "

Again the nurse hesitated. " Not what you'd call rest—not as a rule. Always he's been spending that hour at the Wanderers' Club, over coffee. He finds the relaxation just what he needs."

Muldrew nodded indifferently. For a few minutes he feigned a consuming interest in the paintings that covered the walls. He recalled that Doctor Blaney was a connoisseur in art ; moderate as was his own knowledge of it, he realized that the paintings around him were worth a small fortune.

" Is he an artist too ? " he asked.

" Not an artist—except that he has a wide reputation as a judge of art," the nurse replied.

" He wouldn't have time to paint, anyway, would he ? I suppose he does nothing but surgery."

" If you mean does he do general practice, no. Not for years." She smiled that anyone in the city should not know that.

" Then he wouldn't treat neuritis ? "

" If that's what you wish to see him about, I'm afraid you waste your time waiting. There are a dozen doctors on this street who will be glad to treat you."

" I'll wait," Muldrew said stubbornly. " I was told he treated neuritis—a friend of mine, Jenny Luscombe ; and not so very long ago."

The nurse sat very still. Her face was turned downward, so that Muldrew could see little of it.

" Miss Luscombe ? I don't recall the name. Did she say she was—a patient of Doctor Blaney's ? You're sure it was Doctor Blaney ? "

" I don't think I can have made a mistake. You're sure she wasn't a patient of the Doctor's ? "

The nurse shook her head. " You say it was

recently. I'm sure no one of that name has ever been here. Quite sure," more confidently. "I've been here seven years, and I've a good memory for names. I enter here the name of every patient as she comes," tapping the appointment book.

A valuable nurse Muldrew thought as he watched her—but just now something less than valuable to Doctor Blaney, and growing less valuable with each remark. He said nothing more.

The electric clock pointed to within a minute of eleven when the sound of the closing of the outer door made Muldrew's heart beat quickly. The scene ahead became more hateful.

Doctor Blaney bustled in, limping a little from the accident of the previous afternoon. Muldrew had turned away, but as the Doctor passed he looked up. The limping footsteps faltered, then hurried on. The door of the inner office snapped behind him.

The nurse rose in her quiet way, and followed. Muldrew's eyes clung to her until she disappeared. They were anxious, worried eyes. His hands were clenched on his knees, and a slight perspiration was visible in the lines on his forehead.

Suddenly he rose and stepped out into the hall. As he stood before the window of the outer door the door far away in the dimness at the end of the hall opened softly. It closed more softly still. Muldrew returned to his place in the waiting-room.

It was several minutes before the nurse reappeared. She seemed a little upset. Paying no attention to Muldrew, she went on to the two waiting women.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come back to-morrow," she said in a low voice. "The Doctor has had a very hard morning and must rest. He hasn't felt quite himself for a few days. He's so sorry."

She accompanied them to the door, again expressing her own sorrow and the Doctor's. Then slowly she returned to Muldrew.

"Doctor Blaney will see you in a moment, Mr. Muldrew."

She turned away and began to fuss with the appointment book and some loose papers on the desk.

A small bell tinkled.

"He'll see you now, Mr. Muldrew."

Muldrew rose. His legs felt weak and unsteady, the moisture on his forehead stood in drops. Slowly he opened the door to the inner office.

In there the blinds were drawn, so that the corner where Doctor Blaney sat was in deep shadow. Muldrew's eyes alighted on a pair of white, bloodless hands clutched over the ends of the chair-arms.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Muldrew?"

Something in the voice, a tightness, a strain, an inhuman chill, drew Muldrew swiftly nearer. The Doctor's blanched face twisted to a smile.

"I hope," Muldrew stammered, "you're quite recovered from the accident yesterday. But I see you ——"

"It's nothing, nothing at all. A slight lameness—thank you."

"We've found the car that tried to run you down. It was Jimmy Dolan's!"

Doctor Blaney surged to his feet. "Jimmy—Dolan's!" There was a wild eagerness in his tone, inquiry, surprise.

"Yes, Jimmy Dolan's. . . . But it had been stolen."

Blaney thrust his face forward. "Stolen? You're sure of that?"

Before Muldrew could reply Blaney turned and siezed a bottle from a glass shelf at his back. The

Detective stepped forward, but Blaney evaded him by retiring behind the chair.

"You're sure it was stolen?" he repeated. "Quick!"

"Absolutely sure." Muldrew's face was not less pale than the Doctor's.

The bottle fell with a crash and was shattered on the tiled floor. Muldrew stared from the sluggishly spreading fluid to Blaney's face. The latter smiled, a cold quirk that went to Muldrew's heart.

"You're wrong, Muldrew, it wasn't poison. Poison?" He laughed raspingly. "Olive oil is far from poison. See for yourself." He stooped and touched his finger to the fluid and held it up. Tiny branches of greenish-yellow reached into the cracks between the tiles, or slid along the raised cement to be blocked by another line of cement.

Blaney held his finger high. "Olive oil!" He laughed again. "But what would have been the use? It's far too late for that."

He walked stiffly, like a machine, to a couch and let himself awkwardly down on it.

"Muldrew, I've just six minutes to live. There's nothing can be done. No, don't call the nurse, please. Keep her out of the awful part. I won't suffer—so much. I'd rather die—with you alone—with my conscience cleared a little. I'll tell all about it—now. Where are you telephoning?" he demanded, raising himself on his elbow.

"I'm sorry, Doctor, but there's a form to go through." Muldrew's eyes were moist, and his voice shook. "I'm getting a Doctor. It's only the police doctor."

The dying man dropped back. "That's awfully decent of you, Muldrew. You've played fair—fairer than I deserved. You give me time—to die—and to

tell first. . . . You know I killed Jenny Luscombe. You know why. My reputation, my practice, my sick wife, my family—they seemed then to shriek for it. I was sacrificing myself for all that. I didn't—quite think—it would all be futile—with this greatest of all sacrifices. . . . But I'd do it again and take the consequences.

"The knife—you wondered. You'll find an outer handle for it there in that drawer—it's on a surgeon's knife now. I picked it up in Germany two years ago—just a curiosity then. . . . I see how dangerous it was to keep it secret; I don't know—why I did. . . . The girl was to meet me at the Club—I arranged it—to get some more blackmail money. I knew there were others there she blackmailed, and that you'd find it out. I watched from behind a car—I saw her enter—I followed into the visitors' room."

"Then it *was* you she asked for?"

"Of course. That was to be—part of the alibi. I wouldn't dare do that—if I was guilty. Through the glass of the door—I saw Jacoby go out. . . . I forgot the bill you found in her hand—I'd just given it to her. . . . When I saw you—out there—in the waiting-room, I knew you knew."

For a moment he lay gasping. Muldrew paced the floor. He had done this thing with his own hand, as surely as if he had administered the poison. He had done it—to save Doctor Blaney a more ignominious death. The law—and his own sense of duty—demanded a victim.

"It was—good of you," the choking voice went on, "to let nurse—warn me. You're a—detective—of a different sort. . . . Sentimental. I wish—I'd known you—sooner. May the God I defied reward you! . . . May God," he whispered, "forgive one who—gave—his all—for family—and friends!"

Muldrew could stand it no longer; he rushed for the nurse. She came and sank on her knees beside the couch. Doctor Blaney looked at her and smiled.

"I took it—myself—nurse. Muldrew's—my friend. It doesn't matter—now. My wife—is dying—too."

A slight froth gathered at the corners of his mouth, and with a low gasp his head rolled sideways. The murderer of Jenny Draycott had paid the penalty in his own way.

CHAPTER XXXV

DEDUCTIONS

INSPECTOR ARMITAGE stumped fretfully about the surgery while Muldrew talked. From the start of the story the older man had scarcely opened his lips. But now, as he came on his round beside the body on the couch, he stood looking down on it with shaking head.

"It was clever work, Muldrew, much the cleverest, perhaps, of your career. But," he added querulously, "so deductive. You might have run your head into a noose. Suppose you'd been wrong all through."

Muldrew had taken a chair where his back was to the couch on which lay the body.

"At one stage, sir, it was deductive. But when all my deductions fitted, except for apparent breaks introduced by Jacoby's varying stories, everything looked clear enough. I suspected Blaney from the moment he entered the visitors' room of the Wanderers' Club where Jenny Luscombe was murdered. His alibi was too perfect; she had come to see him, he was not there ——"

"But it turned out to be Forrest she came to see," the Inspector corrected.

"That," said Muldrew, "was one of Jacoby's confusing stories—on second thoughts. I learned quickly to remember his yarns only as part of the fabric of lies he prepared for his own purpose from time to time."

"But why should Jacoby ——"

"If you don't mind, sir, may I finish with Doctor Blaney? It was all so perfect—the girl asking for him, his not being there, his coming in half an hour later as further proof that he was not at the Club at the time of the murder. We recognized the possibility that anyone might enter from the street and murder the girl and escape, but Blaney's idea was that we would never connect that possibility with him after what we saw. For a time it confused me. His air of surprise on seeing the girl was too perfect, too, his confession to knowing her too frank. If he hadn't appeared on the scene at all we'd have taken the trouble to inquire more closely into where he spent the morning.

"His fortuitous remark about her altered appearance almost put him out of the list of suspects. But I suppose his explanation of charity treatments didn't seem to fit in with her dress and make-up at the time of her death. And he was forced to make it a charity case to explain why her name would not be found in his appointment book.

"Such perfect acting throughout—when the obvious thing to do was to keep out of it, as Dolan did, and Lansing, and Forrest. They were all in the same position, so far as blackmail was concerned. It was not only that an innocent man, under blackmail of the victim of the murder, would almost feel guilty, but that he would wish to conceal the fact that he had been blackmailed. Blaney was careful only of the latter.

"My suspicions were more or less confirmed yesterday when the street accident threw Blaney into hysterics. It showed me that he laboured under some tremendous mental strain, a worry that had been suppressed to breaking point. The death of the girl who blackmailed him would have been nothing

but relief were he innocent, so that only something cataclysmic would have upset so badly a surgeon accustomed to death and violence in their most dreadful forms.

"But the convincing clue, I believe, was one small detail of his story explaining his acquaintance with the murdered girl."

Inspector Armitage shook his head. "You've got me there, Muldrew. I heard the story."

"He said he had treated her for neuritis. A surgeon treating for neuritis! He had, he thought, his story complete. He didn't expect to be asked in detail why the girl consulted him—and he had to answer on the spur of the moment to give particulars when requested. Blaney has done nothing but surgery for years. I have the word of his nurse for that. Indeed, the nurse, in her efforts to protect him, gave his case away. Jenny Luscombe had never consulted him at all. One might expect him to support his story more carefully, but you must remember that he could hardly take his nurse into his confidence in a case of murder. Blaney thought the first stages of his alibi would be so convincing that we wouldn't bother to follow the story through.

"Another supporting clue: the murderer of Jenny Luscombe had strong, dexterous fingers, to choke her so swiftly and completely that she was unable to cry out. See those fingers of his—the fingers of an experienced surgeon. That cord about her neck was twisted by a hand like that. There could be no risk of clumsiness.

"Everything that followed, once I rid myself of Jacoby's confusing stories, fitted into my suspicions. Blaney alone, of all those who talked with Dolan yesterday morning in the Club reading-room, stood out against his advice to come clean. Yet he could

not remain silent; he had to call me up to see what clues I had, to express his profound interest in the case. He knew the others were making confessions."

"It was a clever move of his to engage Parsons," the Inspector said.

"But by that time it was too late. In reality it only added to my suspicions about his alibi. . . . I believe one of his main reasons for calling me up was to make sure that I knew he had engaged a private detective. That, too, Dolan had put in his head in that momentous discussion in the reading-room. . . . Of course, I kept a more or less open mind; I didn't neglect the other suspects. I'd have been happier if I had. Dolan's car yesterday afternoon, that so nearly became a murder-car, unsettled me for a time. And for a few moments last night, in an interview with Dolan, I thought I might have made a mistake."

Inspector Armitage was silent for a long time, pacing the small surgery like a caged tiger. Muldrew crouched over his knees, miserable, waiting. The older man halted before the window, his back to the room.

"There won't be any charge against *you*, Muldrew, for murder," he said in a low peevish voice. "No. . . . Because we'll keep some of the facts to ourselves. The law will be satisfied—and I suppose that settles things as comfortably for us as we can hope for. But in this case—and, damn it, in most cases!—you're still the sentimental detective . . . . pretty much of a fool, a terror to me, because I'm responsible for you. If you weren't such a terror to criminals I'd have a lot more to say. Anyway, you saved the country a rope and a hangman. . . . And perhaps it was the one nice way out. I'm inclined to be hard-hearted with murderers."

Muldrew twisted his head so that he could see the limp body on the couch. "There's so much bad in

the best of us," he murmured, "and so much good in the worst."

Inspector Armitage cleared his throat. "Well, we've got more to do, Muldrew, and quickly. Where's Jacoby?"

"With Jenny Luscombe's murderer found I'm free for Jacoby. It was he murdered Bill Draycott. He was afraid Bill would have something to tell. It was Jacoby murdered Wendell Forrest."

"I believe you're right, but why?"

"That," declared Muldrew, "introduces Jacoby's real story. He was the blackmail leader. But he was also in love with Jenny Draycott. That alone accounted for his bursting emotions at the time of the murder. No one felt so keenly as he, so furious with the murderer. It made him a study from the first. His eagerness to bring the newspapers into the affair proved his frantic desire to find the murderer. Then, when we seemed to be arriving nowhere, he undertook to find and punish the murderer himself. He did not know who it was, but he felt convinced it was one of the blackmailed men, so he set out on a round of murder that was to include all the blackmail victims. It was he who stole Dolan's car and tried to kill Thorenson and Blaney. He was more successful with Forrest. All through he was doing his utmost to force us to act against one or another of them.

"He got into the Wanderers' Club for no purpose but to learn the secrets of the members for blackmail. And, in an underhand way, he was getting Bill Draycott to help him. That was how and why Bill got the job of bell-boy, though the lad knew nothing of it. If we hadn't cornered Doctor Blaney, Dolan and Lansing would have been the next to go.

"As a master-criminal Jacoby has shown ingenuity, and a dangerous mind. He went through the girl's

purse to give it the appearance of robbery. He dare not, on such short notice, risk the girl's part being known. It was he or his confederate who went through the girl's effects everywhere to prevent any exposure. His one error—and by that time he felt he had covered his trail — was giving Tiger Lillie his story in his own handwriting. Even Tiger recognized it—though Jacoby did not know I had one of the blackmail envelopes he addressed. His frankness about being himself blackmailed, the girl's third apartment, and the office in the Cosgrave Building, was all part of his scheme. Even his talk with Tiger night before last was to get to me in a roundabout way details of that scheme. It would convince us and any jury that he was a victim of the girl's and had nothing to conceal."

"Then," the Inspector growled, "Dolan goes scot free again."

"I'm afraid he's in luck, as usual, Inspector."

"For the knave he is," said the Inspector, "Dolan has too damned much luck! All right, let's get our man. Jacoby won't have a chance to take his own life."

Muldrew's hand was on the door-knob when someone knocked.

"Tiger Lillie wants to speak to you, Muldrew," a policeman said, when the door was opened. "He's in a fine state—all keyed up."

The two detectives hurried to the waiting-room. Tiger could be seen at the door, held back by a policeman's brawny arm. At sight of Muldrew Tiger dived beneath the arm.

"Gordy! Gordy!" Beneath his hat, thrust well back on his head, his red hair bristled with excitement. "Gordy, it's Jacoby, all right!"

Inspector Armitage caught him by the shoulder and swung him around.

"Speak up, Lillie, and be quick about it."

But something else had attracted Tiger's attention—the dead man lying on the couch in the surgery.

Tiger pointed. "What—what is it, Gordy?"

"Doctor Blaney has confessed to the murder of Jenny Draycott. He has committed suicide."

Tiger caught Muldrew's arm and clung to it. His hat fell unnoticed to the floor.

"But—but that can't be. It's all wrong, I tell you. It was Jacoby. Mrs. Draycott says so."

"What does Mrs. Draycott know about it?" Inspector Armitage demanded.

"She recognized him on the street just now—grabbed him and called for the police. It was he called Bill out and strangled him. She says she recognizes him, I tell you."

Inspector Armitage was already at the door. "Where is Jacoby?" he thundered.

"He got away," Tiger called. "He fought her off and got away. A policeman chased him—Number 124, but Jacoby had too big a start."

A policeman pushed into the room. On his helmet was a number—124. In his hand he carried a coat.

"He got away all right," he admitted. "I never got near him. But he left this coat in that woman's hands. She says he's a murderer."

Muldrew grabbed for the coat. The Inspector thundered an order:

"Get every free man on the tracks of this fellow. Close every road and railroad. Picket the stations, radio the police cars." He snapped out a concise description.

Muldrew had been examining the coat. Now he gave a cry of triumph as he held up a piece of cord.

"The proof I needed—part of the cord we found around the neck of poor little Bill Draycott!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

FURTHER TECHNIQUE

THE postponed weekly meeting of the Writers' Club was under way—four days late. Tiger Lillie, a fair cigar (supplied from the Club's slender funds) caught between his lips, waved a lazy cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. The odour of savoury stew lingered in the air. With a sigh of utter content he leaned back in the chair and stretched his legs before him.

"Yes, sir, it's just what I said the other day—the bit of success that comes to the police in these great crimes is nothing like telepathy—nothing psychic about it. I've worked with Gordy Muldrew once more, as you know—this Jenny Draycott case—and I can tell you if I hadn't, I, a rank amateur, so to speak—that is, I'm not a professional sleuth—if I hadn't worked with Gordy he'd never have got the one vital piece of convicting evidence. Gordy called me in at a delicate point in the case. He saw I was working a line of my own ——"

"Then you *do* believe," ventured the diffident one, "you *do* think it's proper for a reporter to work against the police?"

Tiger looked him over contemptuously. "Who said I worked against them, you mutt? I was after the news—that's my job. If the police don't care to take me into their confidence I get after the dope myself. That's what makes me the reporter I am. My job's bigger than the biggest detective's ——"

"Pity you weren't twins, Tiger," Louis Bracken murmured. "You're so necessary to the paper and to the police too."

"What's chewing Louis," Tiger scolded, "is that *The Gazette* was a mile behind all along the line. Why, they never got near Jacoby, the arch-criminal. I worked on him from the first. As I was saying, a real reporter. . . ."

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